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THESIS

ROOTS OF RUSSIAN IRREGULAR WARFARE

by

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ROOTS OF RUSSIAN IRREGULAR WARFARE

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The Russian experience with irregular warfare runs deep. Russian forces used irregular warfare to defeat Napoleon's army in 1812. Russia conquered vast territory in the latter half of the 19th century, defeating irregulars with impressive economy of force. The Soviets employed partisan guerrillas with increasing skill during the Bolshevik Revolution and the Great Patriotic War. In Afghanistan, the Soviets avoided a Vietnam-like collapse while employing irregular tactics fighting against the Mujahedeen. Russia was at first defeated by, then learned from and turned the tables on, insurgents and irregulars in Chechnya.

The experience Russia gained across the past two centuries of irregular warfare left an indelible mark on and shaped Russian forces for their invasion of Ukraine in 2014. Understanding the roots of Russian irregular warfare—their experiences and how they adapted to unique challenges—could prove invaluable to understanding the future of it.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	RELEVANCE OF THE RUSSIAN EXPERIENCE WITH IRREGULAR WARFARE	1
A.	CURRENT STATUS OF RUSSIAN IRREGULAR WARFARE	2
B.	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	4
C.	THESIS APPROACH	4
	1. Defeat of Napoleon	5
	2. The Great Game	5
	3. The Great War and Russian Civil War	6
	4. Soviet Guerrilla Warfare	6
	5. Soviets in Afghanistan	6
	6. Russians in the Caucasus	7
	7. Russian Irregular Warfare in Ukraine	7
II.	ROOTS OF RUSSIAN IRREGULAR WARFARE	9
A.	THE CAMPAIGN OF 1812	10
	1. Guerre à Outrance	14
	2. Strategic Necessity of Irregular Warfare	19
B.	A MIGHTY <i>BOGATYR</i>	20
III.	RUSSIAN WARFARE AND THE GREAT GAME	23
A.	RUSSIA AS A GREAT POWER	23
	1. Russia Expands South Before Going East	25
	2. Russo-British Competitive Cooperation	26
	3. Russia's Divided Attention	28
B.	RUSSIA AND THE KHANATES IN THE GREAT GAME	29
	1. Military-Led Expansion	33
	2. Imperial Hubris	43
C.	MILITARY LEGACY	45
IV.	FRACTURED EMPIRE	47
A.	IMPERIAL RUSSIA AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY	47
B.	IMPERIAL RUSSIA BREAKS UNDER STRESS	48
	1. Bolsheviks Take Their Gloves Off	50
	2. War in the North	52
	3. The Population Suffers, But Fights	53
	4. Irregulars Incorporated	55
C.	FORESHADOWING AND OPPORTUNITY COSTS	58

D.	CONCLUSION	61
V.	PARTISANS IN THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR	65
A.	CONTEXT IN THE EUROPEAN THEATER OF WORLD WAR TWO	65
1.	The Call For Sacrifice.....	66
2.	Soviet Self-Imposed Hindrances.....	68
B.	GERMAN FAILURE OF INSIGHT AND APPROACH	69
C.	EARLY PARTISAN OPERATIONS – FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL.....	72
D.	PARTISANS EXPAND AND EQUIP	75
E.	SOVIET PARTISANS NEVER REACHED THEIR FULL POTENTIAL	76
1.	A Valuable Supplemental Effect.....	78
2.	Latent Potential Remained Untapped.....	80
VI.	SOVIETS AS COUNTERINSURGENTS	83
A.	INCREMENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN	83
1.	From <i>Coup de Main</i> to Counter-Guerrilla.....	84
2.	From War of Movement to Guerrilla Fighters	87
B.	RE-LEARNING LESSONS	90
C.	FINAL ANALYSIS	97
VII.	WAR IN THE CAUCASUS	99
A.	UNIQUE CHARACTER.....	99
1.	The Social and Cultural Foundation.....	99
2.	Foundational Guerrilla Warfare	101
3.	Radicals Rise.....	104
B.	THE NATIONALIST CAMPAIGN, OR “FIRST” CHECHEN WAR.....	105
1.	The Budennovsk Raid.....	108
2.	Governance Failure and Rise of the Islamic Republic of the North Caucasus.....	110
C.	PUTIN’S WAR—THE “SECOND” CHECHEN WAR.....	112
1.	Success and Failure in the Caucasus	117
2.	The Dubrovka Theater	118
3.	Conclusion of the “Second” Conflict.....	121
D.	WHERE DOES IT GO FROM HERE?	122
VIII.	RUSSIAN IRREGULAR WARFARE IN UKRAINE	125

A.	RUSSIA FILLED THE POST-COLD WAR INFORMATION VACUUM	125
1.	Russia Owned the Narrative Prior to Ukraine.....	126
2.	Waning U.S. Interest Prior to Invasion	127
B.	RUSSIAN MILITARY DEVELOPMENT BEFORE THE INVASION 2008–2012.....	128
1.	Russia’s View of its Vulnerability	129
2.	Duel for Control Leads to War.....	131
C.	RUSSIAN IRREGULAR WARFARE IN UKRAINE	133
1.	Crimea— <i>Coup de Main</i>	134
2.	Eastern Ukraine	136
D.	IRREGULAR WARFARE AT THE COST OF CREDIBILITY	139
IX.	CONCLUSION	143
A.	SUMMARY	143
B.	APPLICATION.....	145
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	147
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	165

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Map of the Russian Campaign of 1812 Showing the Route of March to and from Moscow.	11
Figure 2.	Arena of the Great Game.	31

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I. RELEVANCE OF THE RUSSIAN EXPERIENCE WITH IRREGULAR WARFARE

On February 3, 2016, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter identified countering Russian aggression as America's foremost national defense priority and requested a four-fold increase in spending in Europe for the 2017 defense budget.¹ This reversal comes only a few years past President Obama's "reset with Russia."² Secretary Carter's comments are a result of Russian resurgence. In a *Joint Force Quarterly* article, General Joseph Votel, Lieutenant General Charles Cleaveland, Colonel Charles Connett and Lieutenant Colonel Will Irwin published a paper in which they concluded that the United States has a national policy gap in our own ability to wage "unconventional warfare in the gray zone."³ That statement amounts to an acknowledgement that the United States does not know how to counter what it saw unfold in Ukraine.

While the United States, NATO, partner nations, and many allies have been busy in Iraq and Afghanistan, Russia successfully prosecuted a war with Georgia, conducted counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations in Chechnya, launched an offensive cyber operation in Estonia, and annexed Crimea while fighting a proxy war in Donetsk. Russia seems to have come into its own with the skillful Ukraine campaign. Russia's current form of irregular warfare, called New Generation Warfare, or the Gerasimov Doctrine—after Russian General Valery Gerasimov—or simply Russian hybrid warfare, seems to have capitalized on experiences of the 1990s and 2000s.

But this "new" way of war is deeply rooted in the Russian irregular warfare experiences of the past two centuries. A better understanding of the current Russian

¹ "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Gen. Breedlove in the Pentagon," Department of Defense, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/683817/departement-of-defense-press-briefing-by-gen-breedlove-in-the-pentagon-briefing>.

² "Reset with Russia," White House, April 1, 2009, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2009/04/01/reset-with-russia>.

³ Joseph L. Votel, Charles Cleaveland, Charles Connett and Will Irwin, "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone," *National Defense University Press*, accessed February 14, 2016, <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/NewsArticleView/tabid/7849/Article/643108/unconventional-warfare-in-the-gray-zone.aspx>.

means and methods of irregular warfare will come from a more full understanding of past Russian experiences and challenges in irregular warfare.

A. CURRENT STATUS OF RUSSIAN IRREGULAR WARFARE

The publication of General Gerasimov's "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of carrying out Combat Operations" in February 2013 and the nearly prophetic protests against the pro-Russian government in Ukraine set the stage for Russian involvement in Ukraine. Russia's action against Ukraine gave rise in the United States and Europe to a flurry of articles about and media attention to Russian irregular warfare.⁴

Most Western analysis of recent Russian action—specifically in Ukraine—have made the argument that Russian so-called hybrid warfare is not new, but simply a new label made by Western authors and analysts who struggle to define a complex problem.⁵ Aside from the fact that Russia seemed to be sponsoring war on the European continent, it was the form of warfare—bold and swift covert action backed by unflappable information operations and, when necessary, conventional forces—that was most troubling to the West.

Despite the West's parsing of terms and labels, Russia continues to be involved in combat and related actions in Ukraine while NATO continues to feel threatened by Russia. For its part, Russia feels threatened by NATO's consistent expansion since the Soviet Union collapsed and by the addition of the now-persistent military presence

⁴ See Kipp and McDermott, Nikolaevich, Jones, and Deep for their arguments that hybrid warfare is a new label for an old idea. James Kipp and Roger McDermott, "The Bear Went under the Mountain: Is Russia's Style of Warfare Really New?" accessed February 5, 2016, http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/the-bear-went-under-the-mountain-is-russias-style-of-warfare-really-new_2263.html; Ruslan Pukhov Nikolaevich, "Миф О 'гибридной Войне,'" accessed February 5, 2016, http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2015-05-29/1_war.html. Sam Jones, "Ukraine: Russia's New Art of War," *Financial Times*, August 28, 2014, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/ea5e82fa-2e0c-11e4-b760-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3zYAYU9ME>; Alex Deep, "Hybrid War: Old Concept, New Techniques," Mar 2 2015, accessed February 3, 2016, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/hybrid-war-old-concept-new-techniques>.

⁵ Michael Kofman, "Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts," *War on the Rocks*, March 11, 2016, <http://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts/>.

(thanks in large part to United States European Command's Operation Atlantic Resolve) along the "Eastern Flank" of NATO, in the Russian near abroad.⁶

Impressed by Russia's casual violation of international law when it invaded Ukraine, Jonathan Eyal remarked, "[w]e have spent nearly 200 years defining rules about conflict. Sending in soldiers without markings, introduced in such a cavalier way, denying their existence with absolutely no blush and saying anyone can buy a uniform in a shop – and a month later rewarding them with medals – we have to go back a long way to see something like that."⁷ That is exactly the point. Perhaps fewer people would have been taken aback by Russia's "new" actions and methods if those actions and methods were placed in their historical context.

Certainly the problem has been identified. Frank Hoffman, Max Boot, Dave Maxwell, Nadia Schadlow, and William Nemeth have all written on Russia's current form of irregular warfare—call it what you will—and have identified the fact that the "long-standing Russian concepts of protracted conflict...are not well understood by Americans."⁸ One could say the same about long-standing concepts of Russian irregular warfare.

While the West is still struggling to identify and label Russia's current form of irregular warfare, Russia is surely adapting and refining its forces and techniques from the lessons they have learned in Ukraine. While it would be foolish to try and predict exactly what form Russia's next military adventure will take, it will certainly be informed by their experiences, recent and historical.

⁶ Jorge Benitez, "Commander of U.S. Military in Europe Sees Signs of Russia Preparing Another Offensive," *Atlantic Council*, accessed February 7, 2016, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/commander-of-us-military-in-europe-sees-signs-of-russia-preparing-another-offensive>; Paul Sonne, "Russia Threatens NATO Over Missile Shield," *Wall Street Journal*, April 16, 2015, sec. World, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-threatens-nato-over-missile-shield-1429185058>.

⁷ Jonathan Eyal is the international director at the Royal United Services Institute, a prominent London-based military think-tank; as quoted in Jones, "Ukraine."

⁸ Frank G. Hoffman, "The Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict: Protracted, Gray Zone, Ambiguous, and Hybrid Modes of War," The Heritage Foundation, 29, accessed February 3, 2016, <http://index.heritage.org/military/2016/essays/contemporary-spectrum-of-conflict/>.

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

If Frank Hoffman is correct that Americans do not understand Russian irregular warfare well, then it is all the more important to study the Russian experience now, especially if one's experience is a foundation of learning. As Albert Einstein said, "the...source of knowledge is experience."⁹ It would be difficult to understand the Russian modus operandi in irregular warfare without knowledge of their foundational experiences.

Perhaps more important for a study of other's experiences is Voltaire's query "is there anyone so wise as to learn from the experience of others?"¹⁰ While there is no claim to wisdom in this thesis, the point to take away is that in order to know what Russian irregular warfare has to offer in the way of experiential teaching, one must know what their experiences have been. That knowledge may prove vital for developing counters to current Russian irregular warfare or to learning from it.

C. THESIS APPROACH

Luckily, studies like Alexander Hill's *The War Behind The Eastern Front* have been expanding and revising the record with newly available source material since the fall of the Soviet Union.¹¹ This additional scholarly scrutiny (in Hill's case of the Great Patriotic War era) brings further clarity to the Russian experience in irregular warfare. To paraphrase Robert Schaefer's introduction in *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, irregular warfare is the war of choice in the future for Russia and most other countries—something Generals Joseph Votel and Valery Gerasimov agree with. In order to understand where the future lies, we must understand the path Russia took to get to today.¹²

⁹ V. Taras and M. Gonzalez-Perez, *The Palgrave Handbook of Experiential Learning in International Business* (New York, NY: Springer, 2016), 12.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Alexander Hill, *The War Behind the Eastern Front: The Soviet Partisan Movement in North-West Russia, 1941–1944* (New York, NY: Psychology Press, 2005), 3.

¹² Robert W. Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 1–3.

This thesis will cover key Russian experiences in irregular warfare. The cases addressed will be the Russian victory over Napoleon's *Grande Armée* in the early 19th century; the Great Game; the Great War and the Bolshevik Revolution; Soviet partisans in World War II; the Soviets in Afghanistan; the Insurgency in the Caucasus; and Russia's intervention in Ukraine.

1. Defeat of Napoleon

If winter did not defeat Napoleon's army in 1812, as more than one author claims, what did? The all too obvious answer is the Russians.¹³ Although students of Russian (or French) military history know about Russia's scorched earth policy—leaving no resources for the advancing army—few have studied the irregular nature of the campaign waged against Napoleon. Napoleon's overstretched logistics and the elusiveness of decisive battle—Borodino notwithstanding—precipitated his retreat from Moscow. But it was the constant pressure by the irregulars, enabled by their mobility, flexibility and decentralized command, later combined with the environmental factors that turned his retreat into a rout.¹⁴

2. The Great Game

In the middle of the 19th century, Great Britain continued to expand its already impressive colonial and economic holdings. Expansion into Central Asia by the “British diplomatic and commercial contacts in Central Asia during the 1840s sparked a strong competitive response from Russia.”¹⁵ Tsar Nicholas I dictated Russia fill the “empty space” by subduing the tribal societies of Central Asia. The Russian forces did exactly that with remarkably few soldiers, adopting novel tactics, tailoring units for specific missions and employing and empowering local proxy forces. He approved a “systematic

¹³ Theodore Dodge, *Napoleon* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1907), quoted in Allen F. Chew, “Fighting the Russians in Winter Three Case Studies,” *Leavenworth Papers No. 5* (1981): 3:479, 507.

¹⁴ Jakob Walter, *The Diary of a Napoleonic Foot Soldier* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1991), xix, 92.

¹⁵ Robert F. Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” *Leavenworth Papers, Number 20*, April 1993, <http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/107/107-1/index.html>, 57.

Russian advance employing forward based fortifications and mobile ‘flying detachments’ to subdue local resistance.”¹⁶

3. The Great War and Russian Civil War

The First World War and the Russian Civil War showcased the impact an irregular force can have on a battle or campaign. Among others, partisan forces provided critical support to the Reds while they campaigned against the White Russian and Allied forces in the winter of 1918–1919. Partisans prepared the environment for future conventional operations, gathered intelligence and conducted small operations supporting the Bolsheviks.¹⁷

4. Soviet Guerrilla Warfare

Once Operation Barbarossa was underway, Stalin gave a speech in which he called for action against the Nazis, saying in part that “diversionist groups must be organized to combat enemy troops to foment guerrilla warfare everywhere.”¹⁸ Where the Soviet Army was pushed back, the Soviet partisans rose up against the Wehrmacht. The Soviet partisan detachments fought German forces and overbearing, centralized control to land significant blows against Nazi occupation and supply forces.

5. Soviets in Afghanistan

In both Afghanistan and the first Chechen war the Soviet-turned-Russian Army fought a counterinsurgency via conventional methods.¹⁹ Russia displaced or killed millions of civilians trying to bomb the insurgency out of Afghanistan. Along the way, the Russian military made significant improvements in tactics and equipment based on lessons they learned; lessons Russia had already learned in previous conflicts.

¹⁶ M. V. Frunze, *na frontakh*, 289, telegram, 27 Aug 1920, quoted in Ibid.

¹⁷ Allen F. Chew, “Fighting the Russians in Winter Three Case Studies”, 5, 10–11.

¹⁸ Joseph Stalin, Radio Address of 3 July, 1941, quoted in Nik Cornish and Andrei Karachtchouk, *Soviet Partisan 1941–45* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2014).

¹⁹ Carl Van Dyke, “Kabul to Grozny: A Critique of Soviet (Russian) Counter-insurgency Doctrine,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 9, no. 4 (December 1996): 689–705.

6. Russians in the Caucasus

Russia has a long history in the Caucasus going back centuries. During the “First” Chechen war, Russia fought an irregular force with conventional tactics and was Russia was soundly beaten because of it. However, and perhaps more interesting than Russia’s failure is the success later had in the “Second” Chechen war. Russia began to use irregular tactics and then Moscow enlisted the Chechen strongman Kadyrov to fight insurgents. Russia’s modern divide-and-conquer strategy is amplified by the lessons they learned in both conflicts.

7. Russian Irregular Warfare in Ukraine

George Kennan described Soviet demonstrative diplomacy as a way to “embarrass other governments and stir up opposition among their own people.”²⁰ Demonstrative diplomacy includes the use of military posturing (maneuvers, exercises, shows of force etc.) without actually (openly) conducting military operations.²¹ Before Russia’s war with Ukraine, few scholars would have argued that Soviet doctrine remained relevant to modernizing Russian forces, especially after the Chechen and Georgian wars. However, as Putin stated to Russian audiences in 2005, the fall of the Soviet Union was “a major geopolitical disaster.”²²

It is therefore not surprising to see Russian military exercises and demonstrations along NATO and Ukrainian borders. And while Moscow never admitted to invading Ukraine or supporting the separatists, it annexed Crimea after what Russia described as “friendly people” seized key government infrastructure.²³

²⁰ G.F. Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War* (Princeton, NJ: UP 1989) pp.74-75, quoted in Carl Van Dyke, “Kabul to Grozny,” 690.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Vladimir Putin, “Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation” (The Kremlin, Moscow, April 25, 2005), accessed 01 March 2016, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.shtml.

²³ Ruslan Pukhov Nikolaevich, “Миф о ‘гибридной войне,’” (The Myth of ‘Hybrid Warfare’), accessed February 5, 2016, http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2015-05-29/1_war.html.

Now Russia is in Syria, razing Aleppo and violating international treaties by deploying nuclear-capable ballistic missiles into Kaliningrad.²⁴

²⁴ Dmitry Solovyov and Andrius Sytas, "Russia Moves Nuclear-Capable Missiles into Kaliningrad," *Reuters*, October 8, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-usa-missiles-confirm-idUSKCN1280IV>; Max Fisher, "Russia's Brutal Bombing of Aleppo May Be Calculated, and It May Be Working," *The New York Times*, September 28, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/29/world/middleeast/russias-brutal-bombing-of-aleppo-may-be-calculated-and-it-may-be-working.html>.

II. ROOTS OF RUSSIAN IRREGULAR WARFARE

To understand modern Russian irregular warfare—especially events as they have unfolded in places like Crimea and the Caucasus—one should look at Russian irregular warfare in previous wars. Although history is an imperfect teacher, in that events will never repeat exactly as they once occurred, it would be folly to assume that past events have not shaped the character and narrative drawn on by modern practitioners of warfare. As Robert Jervis says of applying historical lessons to international relations, “[w]hat one learns from key events in international history is an important factor in determining the images that shape the interpretation of incoming information...[and] a range of imaginable situations and allow him to detect patterns and causal links that can help him understand his world.”²⁵ Indeed most cultures venerate their heroes and draw inspiration from glory long past, but never forgotten. Such is the case in the U.S. military, where Rogers’ Rangers, General Greene, J.E.B. Stuart, and Larry Thorne (among a host of others) are celebrated and studied. Such is also the case for Russians and their irregular warfare history.

In reference to Russia’s operations in Ukraine, some have stated that the irregular warfare tactics used were refreshed versions of old Soviet tactics.²⁶ They may well have been, but before they were Soviet, they were simply *Russian*.²⁷ As Russianist James Sherr claims, “today’s Russian state has inherited a culture of influence deriving from the

²⁵ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 215.

²⁶ Keir Giles, “Russia’s ‘New’ Tools for Confronting the West,” Russia and Eurasia Programme (London: Chatham House, March 2016), 2, 5–6, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2016-03-21-russias-new-tools-giles.pdf>; as an example, Maria Snegovaya argues that Russian information warfare in Ukraine simply dusted off Soviet military disinformation tactics due to “the lack of innovation.” She goes on saying that all of the Russian disinformation techniques in Ukraine came directly “from Soviet toolkits.” Maria Snegovaya, “Putin’s Information Warfare In Ukraine: Soviet Origins of Russia’s Hybrid Warfare” (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, September 2015), 12–13, <http://understandingwar.org/report/putins-information-warfare-ukraine-soviet-origins-russias-hybrid-warfare>.

²⁷ Giles, “Russia’s ‘New’ Tools for Confronting the West.”

Soviet and Tsarist past...not simply the product of ‘Cold War mindsets.’”²⁸ But the roots of Russian irregular warfare are not so shallow as to be merely Soviet doctrine reinvented. They go much deeper. The roots of modern Russian irregular warfare—and therefore some of what may have been impressed upon contemporary leaders like Gerasimov—reach back to Russia’s victory over Napoleon in 1812.

A. THE CAMPAIGN OF 1812

When Napoleon crossed the Niemen River in June of 1812 he embarked on what would be his most ill-fated military campaign. His half-million man army chased an enemy that would not stand and fight deep into the Russian heartland. As the *Grande Armée* advanced throughout the summer, the lead elements skirmished with the rearguard of two separate Russian armies, as they retreated deeper into her heartland.²⁹ As the Russians continued to withdraw, they consumed or destroyed most everything in their path. The significant distance of that path can be seen in Figure 1.

²⁸ James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion Russia’s Influence Abroad*, The Means and Ends of Russia’s Influence Abroad (London, UK: Chatham House, 2013), 17–18.

²⁹ At that time, Russia had First and Second Army of the West under separate command, both facing Napoleon’s invasion. Each army acted independently, as separate entities, subordinate to Tsar Alexander I. To further complicate things, the First army was headed northeast while the Second was headed south. Engagement with Napoleon while the armies were split invited wholesale destruction of both armies. A fact which was pointed out by Colonel Carl von Clausewitz to the Tsar himself. The Russians retreated for another month before giving battle. Curtis Cate, *The War of the Two Emperors: The Duel between Napoleon and Alexander -- Russia, 1812* (New York, NY: Random House, 1985), 157–59.

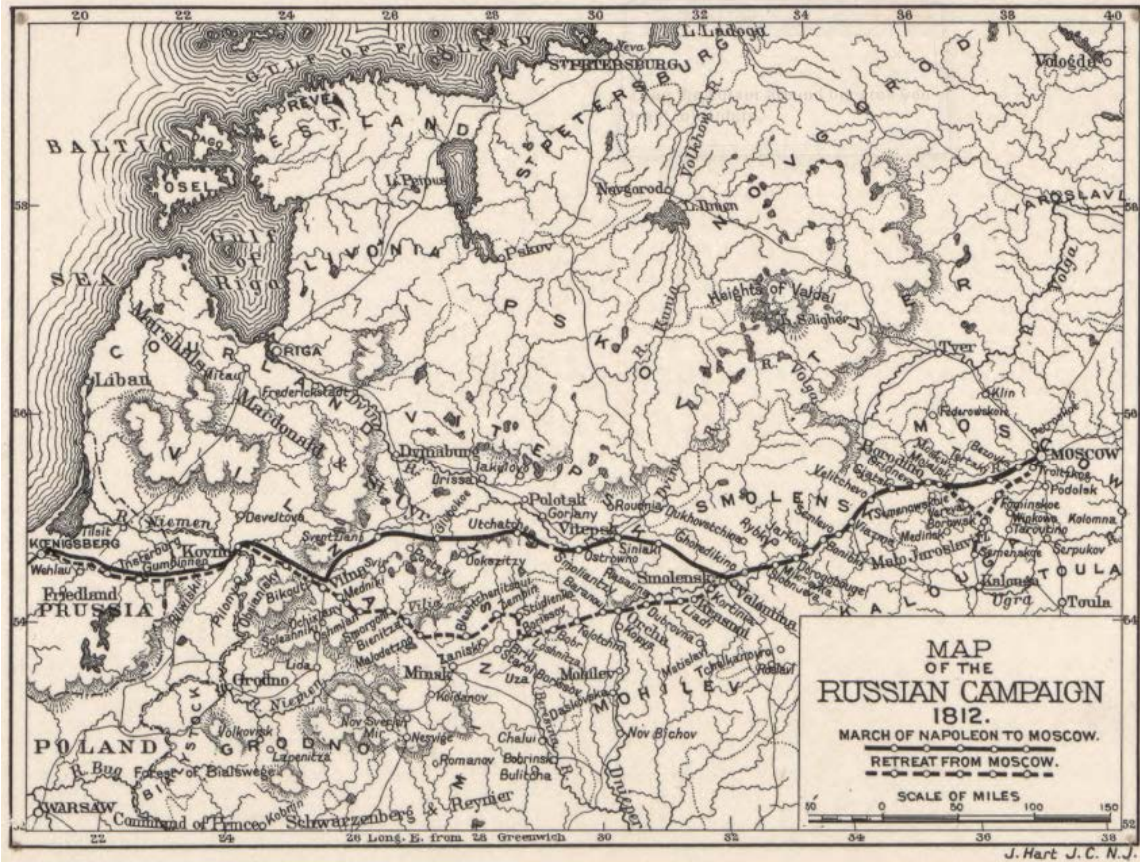


Figure 1. Map of the Russian Campaign of 1812 Showing the Route of March to and from Moscow.³⁰

The march alone took its toll on Napoleon's forces. As Jakob Walter, a German draftee within Napoleon's *Grande Armée* remarked crossing into Russia, "daily the hardships increased," later remarking of the condition of the march that "the men were growing weaker and weaker every day...in most districts there was no water fit for drinking, so that men had to drink out of ditches in which were lying dead horses."³¹ The exhaustion of combat and military service was not the sole station of Napoleon's troops.

³⁰ Source: J. Hart, "Map of the Russian Campaign 1812." Map. Washington, DC: Library of Congress Geography and Map Division. Accessed November 7, 2016. <https://loc.gov/resources/g7011s.ct001046/>.

³¹ Walter, *The Diary of a Napoleonic Foot Soldier*, 40, 44.

Nadezhda Durova was a unique cavalry officer in the Russian army; she hid her gender so she could serve her nation.³² During the 1812 campaign, her unit served as rearguard through the summer retreat. Several times she mentioned the complete exhaustion she felt as the Russian rearguard fought “minor clashes” while protecting the army’s withdrawal.³³

Due to the hardships encountered by the French along the march and the need to leave garrison forces along the route, Clausewitz—who accompanied Tsar Alexander I’s imperial headquarters—estimates that by the middle of August, Napoleon’s force was near 130,000 men, a far cry from the 182,000 he estimated only a few weeks prior.³⁴ A considerable depletion in manpower when compared to the low estimate Clausewitz made of 350,000 French soldiers that crossed the Niemen.³⁵ Clausewitz noted of the invasion so far that “[t]he French had suffered considerably from privation and toil, and occasionally from fighting.”³⁶ Tsar Alexander I finally unified the command of the Russian armies under General Kutuzov with the intention of fighting and defeating a worn-out French army deep in Russian territory.³⁷

With Moscow threatened, Russian elite demanded the city be protected. As Clausewitz stated, General Kutuzov probably would not have picked Borodino as the place of battle “if he had not been compelled to it by the voice of the court, the army, and the nation at large.”³⁸ However, in answer to the “growing clamor of the Russian

³² Nadezhda Durova is a fascinating character. She ran away from home to join the military at a young age. To do so, she had to pretend to be a man under an assumed name. She eventually won a medal for valor (saving an officer’s life) which she received from Tsar Alexander I himself. Nadezhda Durova and Mary F. Zirin, *The Cavalry Maiden: Journals of a Russian Officer in the Napoleonic Wars* (London, UK: Indiana University Press, 1989), 19–21, 65–66.

³³ Durova and Zirin, *The Cavalry Maiden*, 131–133. At one point, Durova’s half of the squadron was given the order to sleep for half an hour, directly behind the battle line of the regiment. She was so exhausted that she was only awakened by a ball-strike to her helmet. *Ibid.*, 139.

³⁴ Cate, *The War of the Two Emperors*, 195.

³⁵ Michael Adams, *Napoleon and Russia* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 407. Carl von Clausewitz, *The Campaign of 1812 in Russia* (Hattiesburg, MS: Academic International, 1970), 11.

³⁶ Clausewitz, *The Campaign of 1812 in Russia*, 60.

³⁷ Felix M. Markham, *Napoleon* (New York, NY: Mentor, 1966), 193.

³⁸ Clausewitz, *The Campaign of 1812 in Russia*, 142.

nobility”³⁹ General Kutuzov chose the fields some 70 miles from Moscow to make a stand against the *Grande Armée*. In a battle that was the Gettysburg of the 1812 campaign, the armies slaughtered each other to crippling effect, but neither achieved the *coup de main* hoped for.

The Russians packed troops into defenses along a narrow front, blocking the two main roads which led to Moscow, and creating a density of 9 to 16 men-per-yard across the front.⁴⁰ The stationary battlefront, which would have been a bloody exchange, was made more gruesome by the intensity of the cannon barrage. Over half of the Russian infantry, some 70,000 men, were deployed, so that a battalion fought only one company wide, but three deep.⁴¹

Once the battle was under way, one officer stated that “it was no longer possible to distinguish one cannon boom from another.” Another stated that the exchange “bore more resemblance to broadsides fired by men-of-war at sea than to an artillery engagement on land.”⁴² Durova recalls, “A hellish day! I have gone almost deaf from the savage, unceasing roar of both artilleries...Even those wounded by [bullets] did not hear them.”⁴³ One author calculates the rate of fire at three cannon shots a second, and 430 musket shots per minute—sustained for the ten-hour battle.⁴⁴ Historian Michael Adams calls the battle, “the highest loss recorded in a single day’s fighting by any European army since Hannibal’s annihilation of the Roman force at Cannea over two millennia before, and it would not be surpassed in the modern era [until] the first day of the Somme.”⁴⁵

³⁹ David G. Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoléon*, Second (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1966), 793.

⁴⁰ Cate, *The War of the Two Emperors*, 223–24.

⁴¹ Dominic Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon: The True Story of the Campaigns of War and Peace* (n.p.: Penguin, 2010), 193.

⁴² Cate, *The War of the Two Emperors*, 235.

⁴³ Durova and Zirin, *The Cavalry Maiden*, 143.

⁴⁴ Cate, *The War of the Two Emperors*, 235.

⁴⁵ Adams, *Napoleon and Russia*, 355.

The French finally won the day, but both armies suffered a nearly one-in-three casualty rate.⁴⁶ Very significantly, the French ended the battle with less than one-third their original horse power, complicating their logistical supply lines.⁴⁷ Neither Napoleon nor Kutuzov succeeded in striking a death blow at Borodino. Rather the battle “had damaged the Imperial army almost as much as Kutuzov’s.”⁴⁸ Napoleon himself called it “the most terrible of all my battles” as echoed by the fact that musket fire and voice commands were drowned out by the incessant cannonade.⁴⁹ Historian David Chandler called Napoleon’s victory at Borodino “an empty triumph for the French cause.”⁵⁰

The Russian army limped back to and then through Moscow as the French continued the advance. The damage done to both armies at Borodino was evident by the fact that an “informal armistice between the opposing armies” existed along the front.⁵¹ But along the flanks and rear of the French army, there was no peace; “not a wagon could pass, not an ounce of forage could be brought in unopposed.”⁵² Russian and French armies were bled white from losses, but it was the Russians who continued to gain an advantage. The inability for each still-massive army to strike a deathblow on the other provided fertile ground for another form of warfare. The gnawing of the Russian irregulars on the French army post-Borodino is the fertile ground in which Russian irregular warfare is rooted.

1. Guerre à Outrance

Just prior to the sting of the battle of Borodino, when the Russian army was considering where to mass and give battle to the French, Lieutenant Colonel Denis

⁴⁶ Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon*, 209; Cate, *The War of the Two Emperors*, 255.

⁴⁷ Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon*, 255.

⁴⁸ Adams, *Napoleon and Russia*, 396.

⁴⁹ Alan Warwick Palmer, *Napoleon in Russia* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 125.

⁵⁰ Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoléon*, 807.

⁵¹ Philippe-Paul Ségur, *History of the Expedition to Russia, Undertaken by the Emperor Napoleon, in the Year 1812.*, 6th ed., and corr. (London, UK: Treuttel, Wurtz, and Richter, 1827), 70–71, [//catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000606968](https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000606968).

⁵² Ibid.

Davydov proposed an idea that ran counter to establishment thinking at the time. Davydov's idea was to separate cavalry into small "detachment[s] and send them to strike at the heart of the cavalcade following Napoleon."⁵³ Soviet Historian Eugene Tarle stated that Davydov's goal was to "harass Napoleon's long line of communication...He proposed that constant attacks and sudden raids be made on this line, on the French bases, on couriers and food trains."⁵⁴ Davydov would use "these irregular units" "which would rapidly go into hiding and escape pursuit after each operation" as "points of concentration of armed peasants."⁵⁵ In other words, as John Arquilla wrote, "Davydov's basic mission was to cripple the *Grande Armée* with deep raids far behinds the lines against small security outposts and supply lines."⁵⁶

The fact that Davydov was bold enough to request and fortuitous enough to receive, a separate force is amazing enough. But what is more amazing is the fact that having asked for a few thousand troops and receiving only 50 Hussar and 80 Cossack cavalry, Davydov set out to execute his plan undeterred.⁵⁷

Acknowledging the necessity of the support by the local population, Davydov's first action in his operational area was to garner the trust and support of the villagers. As he wrote two years after the conflict ended, "in a people's war one must not only speak the local language, but also adopt their ways and their clothes."⁵⁸ In doing so, Davydov was initially able to increase his early warning and intelligence network; he later expanded his partisan force by arming villagers with captured weapons.⁵⁹ Historian

⁵³ Denis Vasil'evich Davydov, *In the Service of the Tsar Against Napoleon: The Memoirs of Denis Davidov, 1806–1814*, ed. Gregory Troubetzkoy (London, UK: Greenhill Books, 1999), 84.

⁵⁴ Evgeniï Viktorovich Tarle, *Napoleon in Russia* (New York, NY: International publishers, 1942), 47.

⁵⁵ Tarle, *Napoleon in Russia*.

⁵⁶ John Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits: How Masters of Irregular Warfare Have Shaped Our World* (Lanham, MD: Ivan R. Dee, 2011), 60.

⁵⁷ Davydov, *In the Service of the Tsar Against Napoleon*, 86.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 87, 90–91.

Dominic Lieven called the former issue “the most important role of the civilian population” when writing about Russian partisan support to the campaign.⁶⁰

Davydov was methodical in instruction to the locals as well as networking the many small bands together. He was also tireless, recording numerous occasions when he attacked a superior force and routed it, thus receiving great spoils and capturing many prisoners.⁶¹ He distributed surplus weapons and spoils to the peasants, then instructed them on how to deal with the French.⁶² He told the peasants to receive the enemy warmly, providing them with food and drink. Then, when the opportunity arose, strike them down. Once killed, ensure that everything, bodies, clothes, and loot included, was buried secretly so that the peasants would not become victims of French reprisals.⁶³

In just over a month, his flying detachment experienced such success that he was able to incorporate several additional Cossack regiments (although not at full strength) as well as create and equip (via captured weapons and freed Russian soldiers) home guards through his area of operation.⁶⁴ The most successful of these “resistance franchises”⁶⁵ occurred when the civil leadership partnered with Davydov’s irregular forces (or other military commanders).⁶⁶ By the 12th of September, 1812 Davydov had, in partnership with civil leadership, armed multiple villages including a single village where the guard numbered 500.⁶⁷ Davydov had also increased his core to over 300 riders.⁶⁸

Shortly after Davydov began his partisan campaign, its effects were felt by the French. As remarkable as the French logistics system was at the time, when the French army captured Moscow it was simply overextended. French engineer and survivor of the

⁶⁰ Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon*, 218.

⁶¹ Davydov, *In the Service of the Tsar Against Napoleon*, 88, 90, 91.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 88.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 90, 93, 113.

⁶⁵ Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, 2011, 61.

⁶⁶ Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon*, 219.

⁶⁷ Davydov, *In the Service of the Tsar Against Napoleon*, 93.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

campaign, Captain Eugène Labaume remarked of the *Grande Armée* occupying Moscow that “in the midst of our apparent victory, the whole army was discouraged and worn out with fatigue. The cavalry was nearly ruined, and the artillery-horses, exhausted by want of food, could no longer draw the guns.”⁶⁹ Count Philippe Paul de Ségur, Napoleon’s aide-de-camp, said of the difficulties created by these partisan operations, “[e]ach measure of oats, each bundle of straw, had to be fought for, dragged out of the enemy. Even the peasantry began to be troublesome. We had war on all sides—in front, on our flanks, in our rear.”⁷⁰ Denis Davydov and his growing band of irregulars were only beginning to reach full effectiveness.

The rear and flanks of the French army were vulnerable as long as the army remained in Moscow, and the French soon found out how vulnerable their entire army was while on the march. Jakob Walter recalls in his diary shortly after leaving Moscow that the “Cossacks [were] in front of and beside us.” That “one no sooner thought of resting than the Russians fell upon our army and cut off many as captives.”⁷¹ Indeed they did. In under two months, Davydov alone had documents proving his small force had captured 3,500 prisoners then transferred them to the Russian army.⁷²

To achieve this feat of arms, Davydov employed novel tactics, deceit, and showed a penchant for learning quickly. He altered or adjusted his tactics after successive battles. In one example, after being severely bloodied in a small village by a determined French force, he used a handful of skirmishers to feign an attack, only to lure the numerically superior force into a waiting ambush.⁷³ On another occasion, he dressed a willing subordinate in peasant clothes and sent him into a French-occupied village to gather intelligence.⁷⁴ As part of his operating procedure, his unit would begin operations in the

⁶⁹ Eugene Labaume, *1812, Through Fire and Ice with Napoleon: A French Officer’s Memoir of the Campaign in Russia* (Solihull, UK: Helion & Company Limited, 2002), 100.

⁷⁰ Comte Philippe Paul de Ségur, *History of the expedition to Russia*, 1825, as quoted in Vasilii Vasil’evich Vereshchagin, *“1812”: Napoleon I in Russia* (London, UK: W. Heinemann, 1899).

⁷¹ Walter, *The Diary of a Napoleonic Foot Soldier*, 60.

⁷² Davydov, *In the Service of the Tsar Against Napoleon*, 141.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

early morning hours against their primary target, then follow leads and exploit the battle until after dawn.⁷⁵

However, as free as he was to conduct operations, he was still a Russian officer and subject to the convoluted Russian command. Even this, Davydov recalls, he felt obliged to circumvent to provide the operational flexibility needed to carry on the campaign.⁷⁶ In order to control several additional Cossack units, Davydov submitted duplicate “official reports” to an adjacent commander, while he continued to send his actual reporting to his true commander. The adjacent commander succumbed to the flattery and was all too happy to unknowingly double-count Davydov’s successes as his own. Davydov’s deception earned him two additional Cossack regiments.⁷⁷

When the French found him intolerable, they sent two thousand cavalry to destroy his operation. By remaining mobile and well informed (thanks to the peasant support Davydov cultivated) he was able to exhaust, split and then defeat the French force even though it outnumbered him 4 to 1.⁷⁸

As the pace of the French retreat increased, so did the tempo and scope of Davydov’s operations. The *Grande Armée* was suffering greatly, more from the lack of food and forage combined with the ceaseless attacks, than from the looming winter weather. The retreating French army, which was at times a column nearly 50 miles long, found that the near-constant assault on the lines of communication by irregular forces jeopardized its connection with allied territory and France herself.⁷⁹ As Captain Lebaume recalls of the horrid march in early November, “we were assailed by a population eager to avenge the horror to which it had been the victim.”⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Ibid., 87–88.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 91.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 94, 116.

⁷⁹ Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoléon*, 816, 823.

⁸⁰ Labaume, *1812, Through Fire and Ice with Napoleon*, 132.

There were other Russian raiding forces working against the now-dwindling French. Occasionally Davydov worked with fellow commanders of Cossack-centric irregular units, but generally, he used his force as he saw fit and on his own.⁸¹ Certainly, Davydov was not the lone Russian enlisting the help of the Russian serf, and for that matter in certain areas the peasants needed no prodding from authority to take vengeance upon the French. In one letter to Tsar Alexander, General Kutuzov said of peasant resistance to the French foraging parties: “[q]uite often even the women had helped to trap and destroy the enemy.”⁸² Tarlé credits the wife of a village elder in Davydov’s area of operation with displaying “no less valor than the men” when she “frequently attacked straggling French baggage wagons with pitchfork or scythe” killing or capturing “many French soldiers.”⁸³ As Jakob Walter recalls in early December “the Russians pressed nearer and nearer from every side, and the murdering and torturing seemed about to annihilate everyone.”⁸⁴ The slaughter continued through extreme winter conditions in Russia, then across the German states until Paris fell and the Tsar stood in Paris.⁸⁵

2. Strategic Necessity of Irregular Warfare

The *Grande Armée* crossed into Russia with a half a million men. The 1812 campaign claimed 475,000 losses or nearly 85 percent of that army.⁸⁶ Napoleon lost 100,000 soldiers to exposure, desertion or disease; he lost 125,000 killed in various battles, and he lost 190,000 captured.⁸⁷ Of the army that departed Moscow—some 95,000 strong—only “a few thousand men” left Russia.⁸⁸ Certainly significant damage was done to the *Grand Armée* by the “perpetual pressure from the Cossacks” that

⁸¹ Davydov, *In the Service of the Tsar Against Napoleon*, 134.

⁸² Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon*, 219.

⁸³ Tarle, *Napoleon in Russia*, 49.

⁸⁴ Walter, *The Diary of a Napoleonic Foot Soldier*, 83.

⁸⁵ Palmer, *Napoleon in Russia*, 265–66.

⁸⁶ Adams, *Napoleon and Russia*, 405.

⁸⁷ Cate, *The War of the Two Emperors*, 396.

⁸⁸ Adams, *Napoleon and Russia*, 405.

Chandler notes.⁸⁹ The Russians, who fielded a smaller army, even when taking replacements into account, also lost horrible numbers of soldiers during the campaign. In total, Russian casualties were at least 250,000.⁹⁰ Put another way, two-thirds of all the soldiers on both sides who served during the six-month campaign died.⁹¹

Because of the massive wounding of both armies, the Russians were forced to rely on irregular tactics, rather than attritional, army-to-army conventional warfare to chase the French out of Russia. What emerged from the militarily crippling campaign was acceptance-through-necessity of a previously minor contributing factor—the irregular. While in General Dokhturov’s camp, Davydov spoke with Prince Kudashev, who implored him to “carry on as you are, and be guided by your heart as well as your head. I don’t care if you wear a cap instead of a shako, and a peasant’s overcoat instead of a uniform. There’s a time for everything.”⁹²

B. A MIGHTY *BOGATYR*

Kutuzov was unable to strike the *coup de grâce*, even after both armies were bled white. Small raids, constant harassment, and supply denial operations conducted by irregular units like Davydov’s, supported by the population, provided the victory the regular Russian army could not. Finding that they had no other option, Russian commanders allowed Hussar-Cossack-partisan elements to work. In Davydov, contemporary Russians have an important example and hero—a mighty *bogatyr*—whose exploits should be understood by those seeking to understand the history Russian irregular warfare is rooted in.

The lasting impact of Davydov is far from just the many tactical victories won or the significant operational effects brought to bear against Napoleon’s army. Denis Davydov provided Russia a successful and relevant example for irregular warfare. As

⁸⁹ Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoléon*, 824.

⁹⁰ Adams, *Napoleon and Russia*, 407.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Davydov, *In the Service of the Tsar Against Napoleon*, 141.

Neustadt and May point out, “[t]he future can never look exactly like the past...But past conditions can offer clues to future possibilities.”⁹³

Davydov’s use of a purpose-built force striking against a larger and more powerful enemy (before the *Grande Armée* collapsed) where he wanted, when he wanted is the archetype of Russian irregular warfare, long venerated in Russian circles. His use of deception at the tactical level was flawless and timely and showed a thorough knowledge of the opponents he faced. It provided the edge a smaller force like his must have over a larger one to be successful. His freedom of action—freedom from being directed by a higher, conventional command—provided the flexibility he needed to swiftly adapt and, when the circumstances called for it, rapidly exploit battlefield success.

While Davydov brought his previous combat experiences to his role as commander of an irregular unit, he formed, refined and later recorded his prescription for success. Something every practitioner should be thankful for. Certainly, the circumstances were favorable for an irregular element to conduct partisan operations, but the circumstances should serve to enhance, rather than detract from the example recorded by Davydov.

⁹³ Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking In Time: The Uses Of History For Decision Makers* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 92.

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III. RUSSIAN WARFARE AND THE GREAT GAME

Before Russia defeated Napoleon, the British and Russian empires were thousands of miles apart. By 1876 they were less than one thousand and closing fast. At the close of the century, British India was only twenty miles—the width of the Afghan finger—from Russian territory. Most of the expansion was dictated by potentates but executed by officials far from any capital or European palace. Ambitious officers and explorers, many times one and the same, believed it was their duty to take action without waiting for specific direction from their superiors, as long as their actions positioned their country in favorable terms either with regard to the locals, the other great powers, or both.⁹⁴

This independence of action by local commanders characterized much of the exploration and many episodes of the Great Game. As it unfolded for nearly a century, the spread of Russian interest into Central Asia was dominated by military expansion. That expansion was both ruthless and patient. More often than not, decisions made by local commanders were based on what the commander believed was in the best interest of the Empire. The impact of these decisions was, at times, strategic and generally backed the government rather than hindered by micromanagement.

A. RUSSIA AS A GREAT POWER

In the study of international relations, one common belief about Russia is that it wants to be seen and recognized as a great power. It has a need to be validated by other powers who have been recognized as great. Iver Neumann makes the claim that Russia's "quest" to be a great power "has taken on an importance that places it squarely at the center of Russian identity politics."⁹⁵ Neumann goes further to assert that "Russia has to be a great power, or it will be nothing."⁹⁶ Russian Foreign Minister Aleksandr Izvolsky,

⁹⁴ Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (Washington, DC: Basic Books, 2009).

⁹⁵ Iver B Neumann, "Russia as a Great Power, 1815–2007," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 11, no. 2 (June 2008): 128, doi:10.1057/jird.2008.7.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

a proponent of the Anglo-Russo convention of 1907, made the same claim over a hundred years ago when he commented that Russia's "decline to the level of a second class power...would be a major catastrophe."⁹⁷ Russian President Vladimir Putin himself made a similar claim in 2005 when he said during the annual address to the Russian Federation that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a "major geopolitical disaster of the century."⁹⁸ Accepting at face value Russia's "quest" for great power status as a central pillar of Russian foreign policy—a common theme of Imperial as well as modern Russia—adds great clarity to the situation in which Tsar Alexander I found himself in 1815.

In 1814, Russian troops were greeted as liberators in Paris after helping Europe push back Napoleon's Grande Armée. Even though Russia played no part in Napoleon's final downfall, Russia's reputation was such that Tsar Alexander I gained a "Folk-hero" reputation "not only in France but in most of Europe."⁹⁹ It is no surprise, then, that Tsar Alexander I remained "intent on playing the role of a great power, with a correspondingly great army" even though "Russia had emerged from the Napoleonic wars militarily and politically triumphant but economically shattered."¹⁰⁰

Although it remains the dominant theme of post-Napoleonic Europe, namely that "Britain and Russia had become global powers" and that "Russia's immense power was felt in every corner"¹⁰¹ of Europe, not all scholars agree with that assertion. Paul Schroeder pulls from German sources to tamp down Russia's great power status, saying "[t]he common view that Russia enjoyed an enormous and growing power and prestige in

⁹⁷ Ray Taras, *Russia's Identity in International Relations: Images, Perceptions, Misperceptions* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 25.

⁹⁸ Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," 2005.

⁹⁹ J. N. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour: Russian History, 1812–1992* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), 7–8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰¹ John P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700–1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 254.

Europe until the Crimean War broke the bubble is a great exaggeration.”¹⁰² But, what does remain true, even if Russia was not, in point of fact, a great power, is that Tsar Alexander I “felt free to play the role of arbiter of Europe.”¹⁰³

1. Russia Expands South Before Going East

Before Russia’s attention turned to Central Asia, it was engaged in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Poland for much of the 18th and early 19th centuries. In fact, after the eastern Slavs were incorporated into Russia (as marked by the annexation of the “holy city” Kiev in 1667), Russian focus turned to the Ottoman border and Persian frontier around the Black Sea. The back-and-forth nature of Russo-Turkic military competition in the Caucasus moved permanently in Russia’s favor when it annexed the Christian country of Georgia in 1801.¹⁰⁴ By the middle of the 19th century, after the Crimean War (1853-1856), expansion into the so-called empty spaces to the east overshadowed Russia’s repeated attempts to subdue the mountain people of the Caucasus and push on the border with the Ottomans.¹⁰⁵

As Russia enjoyed successes in the early 19th century, the British were extending their control outward from India into the frontier along the Indus River:

the effect was to transform [Russia’s] Southern Frontier and the core areas themselves [modern Central Asia] into frontier zones separating the Russian and the British empires. Every move by either one of the global powers triggered anxiety and called for a response in the other’s capital, and both powers began to probe for a line of an optimum of conquest to demarcate the outer boundary of their respective possessions.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Georg StadtmUller, “Die russische Weltmacht und ihr Ruckzug (1783-1867),” in StadtmUller, *Grundfragen der europdischen Geschichte* (Munich and Vienna: R. Oldenbourg, 1965) as paraphrased in Paul W. Schroeder, “The 19th-Century International System: Changes in the Structure,” *World Politics* 39, no. 1 (October 1986): 1–26, doi:10.2307/2010296.

¹⁰³ Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour*, 23.

¹⁰⁴ Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan.”

¹⁰⁵ In his section on Russia and its southern frontier, LeDonne clearly lays out the multiple boundary changes between Russian and the Ottoman Empire on both sides of the Black Sea as the result of conflict from 1700 to 1878. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700–1917*, 89–110.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

Russia continued to push on the Turks and Persians. In 1825 the Persian Shah, with the blessing of the Shi'ite clergy, called for a holy war against Russia for its ruthless treatment of Persia's old frontier zones.¹⁰⁷ In response, Russian forces under General Ivan Paskievich went on the offensive, moving toward Tehran.¹⁰⁸ When the Shah came to the negotiating table, Great Britain offered to mediate. This offer was roundly rejected by Russia, stating that as a "general maxim" of Russian foreign policy, "Persian affairs belonged to the sphere of its 'exclusive interest.'"¹⁰⁹ If read generically, the passage could find its historic parallel in Syria or the Ukraine today. Again Russia dominated a weaker neighbor militarily and was able to extract its desired terms and gain territory.

2. Russo-British Competitive Cooperation

Greek Orthodox Christian minority populations under Turkish rule in the Ottoman Empire remained closely linked with Russia in the 19th century. By 1820, the Greeks, who had hitherto gained status and wealth by acting on behalf of the Ottomans, were heavily persecuted by them.¹¹⁰ Although Russia was connected to them through Orthodox Christianity and Byzantine history, Britain was connected to both the Greeks and Ottomans through trade, thus creating tension between the two great powers. When the Greeks revolted against the Ottomans in 1821, Russia, although sympathetic, provided no aid to the Greek rebels, whereas Britain did.¹¹¹

The rebels were massacred, although bands of Greeks moved into inaccessible places and pockets held out. The Greeks' goal was "to prolong their resistance and create a condition in the Balkans that eventually forced the great powers to intervene."¹¹² The Ottomans, unable to route the Greek holdouts in the mountains, targeted the vulnerable Christian population in Constantinople. The head of the Orthodox Church, Patriarch

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 118.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Barbara Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814–1914* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1964), 64–65.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 68.

¹¹² Ibid., 66.

Gregory “along with some of his bishops was seized by a group of Janissaries and hanged in front of his own church” on Easter night.¹¹³ The Turks followed the hanging with a general massacre of Orthodox Greeks in the city. Tsar Alexander I wanted to avoid war with the Ottomans, so he also tried to frame the conflict as a “revolt of a people against their leader” rather than a Christian-Muslim divide.¹¹⁴ The allies offered to mediate a resolution to the “war of extermination,” but the Ottomans refused.¹¹⁵ An explosion during a tense naval standoff in Navarino Bay between the Ottoman navy and a flotilla of British, Russian and French ships led to fighting and ultimately left the Ottomans without a fleet.¹¹⁶ With help from the British, French and Russian governments, the Greeks won their independence in 1832.¹¹⁷

Russia made it abundantly clear to the Turks that continued existence of the Ottoman Empire was only because the Russians wanted it so. In a secret circular from Russia to the Turkish government, Russia stated that “if [the Turkish government] is still able to live, it will be only the life that the [Russian] emperor is pleased to allow it.”¹¹⁸ Russia’s positioning was clearly an attempt to pull the Ottoman Empire into Russia’s sphere of influence and away from Britain. The strategy worked for nearly two decades until it led to the Crimean War.

This “competitive cooperation” between London and Moscow characterized the initial portion of the Great Game. This period of the early 19th century saw Russia interacting with other European powers, albeit mostly France and England in this context, as peer great powers. It is a state of affairs and set of circumstances which “led to a situation in which Russian territorial consciousness and Russian national consciousness became deeply intertwined and where Russian values stressed the size and expansion of

¹¹³ Ibid., 67.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700–1917*, 120.

¹¹⁶ LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700–1917*, 121.

¹¹⁷ Richard Clogg, *Anglo-Greek Attitudes Studies in History* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 10.

¹¹⁸ Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814–1914*, 76.

Russia's territory as national achievements.”¹¹⁹ This national identification and desire for expansion and buffer areas brought Russia into conflict with the other great powers. The relative peace and status quo of European power could not last long as each empire sought to expand into unclaimed or still-contested spaces.

3. Russia's Divided Attention

During the middle of the 19th century, Russia was conducting business-as-usual for a European great power. Negotiation, high intrigue, and competition between European powers for influence and control of the weakening Ottoman Empire was balanced by Russia as it pursued expansion elsewhere. The Russo-British cooperative competition was not limited to Europe. Russian pressure on Iran is credited with Iran's invasion of Afghanistan which the British took as a threat to its holdings in India.¹²⁰ Interestingly, Tsar Nicholas I attempted to resolve Ottoman-Egyptian tensions with the British by sending an emissary to London so that the great powers could arrange a settlement of the disagreements of the lesser powers.¹²¹

Concurrent with the geopolitical episodes and the Anglo-Russo “competitive cooperation” over the Greeks and access to the Bosphorus, Russia was militarily involved in subjugating the central Caucasus. From the earliest encounters, Russia had been fighting against tribes in the Caucasus. These tribes would be beaten back by the superpower of the day, the Mongols, the Huns, the Persians or the Russians.¹²² The Silk Road passages through the Caucasus (or in the case of Derbent, around them) were the subject of conquest after conquest. Each time a major power pursued the local inhabitants, they fled to the protection of the mountains. In Russia's case, it was no different.

¹¹⁹ Jane Burbank, Mark Von Hagen, and Anatoly Remnev, eds., *Russian Empire : Space, People, Power, 1700–1930* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 53, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10225107>.

¹²⁰ Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814–1914*, 83.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 89–91.

¹²² Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 49–51.

For the purposes of this chapter, it is sufficient to point out the brutality of the conquest and the resources committed to it.¹²³ Resources which were then unavailable elsewhere in the empire. Tsar Alexander I appointed a butcher of a general and hero of the Napoleonic Wars as Proconsul of the Caucasus. In a statement not long after his appointment, General Yermolov said, “I desire that the terror of my name should guard our frontiers more potently than chains or fortresses, that my word should be for the natives a law more inevitable than death.”¹²⁴ Russia committed both regular and Cossack units, eventually having no fewer than 300,000 soldiers committed to the area, in order to anchor a series of forts and conduct the massive sweeping operations required to rid the mountains of Caucasian fighters.¹²⁵ Although there were varying degrees of success and pacification, it never fully worked.

B. RUSSIA AND THE KHANATES IN THE GREAT GAME

General Skobelev, who was highly regarded for his conquests of Khiva and pacification of the Fergana valley, said of his approach to the region, “I hold it a principle that in Asia the duration of peace is in direct proportion to the slaughter you inflict upon the enemy. Strike hard and keep on striking till resistance ends, then form ranks, cease slaughter and be kind to the prostrate enemy.”¹²⁶ His comments illustrate the Russian approach to fighting any non-European force at the time, as well as the experience inculcated from Imperial expeditions and campaigns thus far. Skobelev’s excessive violence, followed by benevolence, can be seen as deliberately framed operations for their psychological importance. His approach can be seen as the road map Russia largely followed in dealing with the Khanates during the Great Game, though their methods and tactics were adapted along the way.

¹²³ In Chapter III, I address the Caucasus with a special focus on the Vainakh (Chechen and Ingush people) resistance to the Russian-Soviet-Russian domination.

¹²⁴ John Frederick Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus* (New York, NY: Longmans, Green and Company, 1908), 97.

¹²⁵ Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 5–7.

¹²⁶ Olaf Caroe, “Soviet Colonialism in Central Asia,” *Foreign Affairs* 32, no. 1 (1953): 136.

According to at least one author, the Central Asian “steppe is a land fit for nomads; and only nomads.”¹²⁷ The tactics of mobility (feigned retreat, ambush, encirclement and indirect engagements) for the steppe nomads changed little but remained effective, even against the Russians, for quite some time.¹²⁸ The nomadic tribes Russia encountered were accustomed to dry and seemingly barren terrain, but it would take the failure of Russian military expedition against Khiva in 1839 before military leadership appreciated the difficulties associated with the environment.¹²⁹ Figure 2 shows the vast expanse of the steppe between the Orenburg line and the Khanates farther south.

¹²⁷ Duncan Noble, *Dawn of the Horse Warriors* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Military, 2015), 12.

¹²⁸ J. Bushnell, “Warriors of the Steppe: A Military History of Central Asia 500 B.C. to 1700 A.D., by Erik Hildinger,” *Journal of Military History* 63, no. 1 (1999): 171.

¹²⁹ Alex Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1860–1917* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 52.



Figure 2. Arena of the Great Game.¹³⁰

But as Russian focus turned toward the unique operating environment of Central Asia, the military adapted techniques to the environment and the enemy they faced. Logistics of a military campaign on the steppes “required months of planning to accumulate the necessary supplies” as Perovski’s ill-fated 1839 expedition demonstrated with a year and a half of preparation at Orenburg.¹³¹ This massing and preparation certainly had the effect of telegraphing intent to launch a military expedition, even if it was not clear where the pending expedition would head.¹³² Russia would later adapt

¹³⁰ Source: John Ure, *The Cossacks: An Illustrated History* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2002), 203.

¹³¹ Alexander Morrison, “Introduction: Killing the Cotton Canard and Getting Rid of the Great Game: Rewriting the Russian Conquest of Central Asia, 1814–1895,” *Central Asian Survey* 33, no. 2 (2014): 136.

¹³² *Ibid.*

from these large expeditions requiring months or years to prepare for, opting for smaller, flexible forces.

As Russia's foothold strengthened in the Caucasus, and its position was established in Europe, Russia expanded south and west. General Perovski's failed 1839 expedition into Central Asia, and later, his establishment of a settlement on the bank of the Syr-Darya¹³³ marked a decisive turn in Russia's attention to what Tsar Nicholas I called the "empty space" of Central Asia.¹³⁴ As an interesting historical footnote and striking parallel to part of Russia's stated motives for going to war with Ukraine in 2014, General Perovski's expedition had set out to rescue Russian citizens who had been enslaved by the Khan of Khiva. Although General Perovski's expedition was defeated by weather, a young British officer was able to secure the release of all 416 Russians.¹³⁵ In another interesting occurrence of the cooperative competition between the British Empire and Russia, the Russian ex-slaves were turned over to General Perovski and the British officer was thanked by the Tsar.¹³⁶ The result was, as Robert Baumann states, Russia's "rivalry with England served more as a stimulant than a deterrent to Russian expansion, impelling Russia to move preemptively in Central Asia."¹³⁷

Russian strategist Nikolai Obruchev said of the prevailing outlook at the time that "Russia, leaning on Asia, seems with respect to Europe the greatest of powers, invulnerable either from the rear or the flank."¹³⁸ Russia was certainly enjoying all of the trappings of an Empire. As was the imperative at the time, Russia continued to advance

¹³³ Hugo Stumm, *Russia in Central Asia, The Expedition to Khiva*, trans. J. W. Ozanne and H. Sachs (London, UK: Harrison and Sons, 1885), 26.

¹³⁴ M. V. *Frunze na frontakh*, 289, telegram, 27 August 1920, quoted in Baumann, "Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan."

¹³⁵ Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York, NY: Kodansha International, 1994), 213–24.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 226–27.

¹³⁷ Baumann, "Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan," 49.

¹³⁸ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv, F. 401, Op. 2–926 (1872), d. 19, 11. 300-OI: 'Concerning railroads essential to the military', 1868, as quoted in David Rich, "Imperialism, Reform and Strategy: Russian Military Statistics, 1840–1880," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 74, no. 4 (1996): 621.

along its frontiers into contested or unclaimed areas of Asia. What the Russians found seemed backward to them, and feed the Imperial-racism attitude that was prevalent in Russia and Europe at the time.

All of the preparation and adaptation of the Russian military seem almost unnecessary when one considers the weak condition of the armed forces of Bukhara (the strongest of the Central Asian states at that time).¹³⁹ Reforms started in the 1830s were never completed, leaving Bukhara with a military force heavily reliant on conscription and “thus remained partly medieval in structure, technology and training.”¹⁴⁰ Even as late as the 1860s, the Bukharan artillery was a mix of pieces, most of which could not be adjusted for elevation.¹⁴¹ The small arms were mostly matchlocks which allowed Russian forces nearly double the range of effective fires.¹⁴²

1. Military-Led Expansion

Writing of the fort established by General Perovski in 1847, Eugene Schuyler notes that it is at “the junction of all the trade routes in Central Asia, as the road from Orenburg meets here with the Khivan, Bukharan, and Tashkent roads.”¹⁴³ Although General Perovski’s first expedition was not successful, it began an avalanche of exploration and expansion into Central Asia.

Prior to General Perovski’s expedition, there had been sporadic military forays into Central Asia, going back to Peter the Great, with mixed results. Just as the Russians had done in the Caucasus, they established a line of forts along the border of the steppes.”¹⁴⁴ These forts, guarded by Cossack settlers, served both as a deterrent to

¹³⁹ A.M. Malikov, “The Russian Conquest of the Bukharan Emirate: Military and Diplomatic Aspects,” *Central Asian Survey* 33, no. 2 (2014): 182.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 183.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Eugene Schuyler and Vasilii Vasil'evich Grigor'ev, *Turkistan: Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkistan, Khokand, Bukhara, and Kuldja* (New York, NY: Scribner, Armstrong & Company, 1877), 44–45.

¹⁴⁴ Stumm, *Russia in Central Asia, The Expedition to Khiva*, 207.

Kazakh raiders, but also as launching points for Russian raids.¹⁴⁵ This system of manning a series of outposts, then conducting patrols along the frontier areas, augmented by retaliatory raids was the Russian staple of dealing with the irregular threat until the Empire subsumed them.

After years of chasing Kazakh raiding parties from the northern line of forts, Russians and Cossacks began to target the logistical support of the Kazakh raiders. Russian commanders directed “their punitive raids against Kazakh villages and encampments for the purpose of driving off cattle, destroying property, and demoralizing the populace.”¹⁴⁶ Well before the Crimean War, the steppes were under the thumb of Russian-appointed chieftains (with a 200-man Cossack bodyguard) who reported either to the administration in Western Siberia or Orenburg.¹⁴⁷

The Russian belief that it must maintain the prestige of a Great Power, combined with the belief overwhelming initial violence as General Skobelev articulated, characterized Russian campaigns in Central Asia. Russia wanted to “inflict a cult of fear upon their opponents” in Central Asia.¹⁴⁸ This initial harshness would stand in stark contrast to the treatment after the conflict; a policy that led to tactics which sought to make the battles violent and meter out “maximum destruction” for the “psychological effect.”¹⁴⁹

After the ill-fated rescue raid on Khiva, the Khanate of Kokand attempted to supplant Khiva as Russia’s largest threat in Central Asia. Tsar Nicholas I issued an order to solve “the difficulty of controlling a border territory inhabited by nomadic, semi-barbarous tribes”¹⁵⁰ by systematically advancing and subduing local resistance on the

¹⁴⁵ Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 53.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1860–1917*, 62.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814–1914*, 168.

steppe. Using a system of flying detachments sent out from the outposts, Russian forces continually spread into Kokand, defeating and pushing the nomadic inhabitants back.

After 1847, campaigns crossing the Kazahk steppe would transit the Syr-Darya river during the summer, as opposed to waiting for winter to cross the great expanse.¹⁵¹ Once underway, new regulations were passed which allowed “men to march in shirtsleeve order, carrying only a musket and a bag of ammunition across the shoulder. Their greatcoats and satchels were carried on carts or across artillery gun carriages and the men were allowed to march freely, without observing the rigid marching-step.”¹⁵²

Tactically, much was learned and transferred from the Caucasus experience to the Central Asian forces. Russian forces no longer preferred to travel in long column with the trains extended behind the main column and lightly guarded. Instead, Russian forces perfected the “technique of ‘carrying the column in a box’ as the only way to avoid defeat in detail” against the raiding parties that attacked and then vanished into the steppe.¹⁵³ General Skobelev stated that “the main principle of Asiatic tactics is to observe close formations.”¹⁵⁴ These formations would then march toward their objectives “without any continuous defended lines of communication, moving rather like ships at sea.”¹⁵⁵ In another deviation from the European norms of the time, expeditionary forces would have their advance guard within sight of the main body, and pickets of infantry or screens of Cossack cavalry would guard the logistics trains placed internal to the main body.¹⁵⁶

These alterations, which represented a complete departure from what the Orenburg line and West Siberian line forces were accustomed to, were learned over time and constituted best practices and “practical experience by the local unit commanders.”¹⁵⁷ Even ruses were employed by the Russians to gain military advantage.

¹⁵¹ Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1860–1917*, 52.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 53.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 52.

In 1857 a Russian military commander, when ambushed by Turkomans, “dispersed them with fireworks” effectively.¹⁵⁸ Ruses aside, the revolutionary innovation in the military—the departure from European-style warfare—was critical to Russia’s success in Central Asia. As they faced irregular opponents they were forced to adapt irregular methods.

Russia also brought the latest weapons technology to bear (when it could afford to do so), thanks to the Russian General Staff’s preoccupation with the scientific improvement of warfare.¹⁵⁹ The flying detachments of Russian Cossack cavalry were armed with rocket batteries which are the “direct technological antecedents of the fearsome Soviet Katyusha rocket batteries.”¹⁶⁰ These flying detachments and their newly found firepower proved “particularly effective in Central Asia in shattering the attack of the Asiatic cavalry.”¹⁶¹ One cannot help but see a resemblance between the Russian small, mobile detachments with impressive firepower and modern U.S. Special Operations Forces backed by close air support.

The Russians moved from the mouth of the Syr River at the Caspian Sea inward, capturing Ak Mechet in 1853.¹⁶² In a large pincer movement, another force from the east moved from Siberia and encamped in what is now Alma Ata, creating a fortification named Vernoe.¹⁶³ By 1864, Russia had nearly enclosed the entire steppe. In an effort to finish the job, a force from Orenburg under Colonel Verevkin and a force from Vernoe under Colonel Cherniaev set out toward Chimkent.¹⁶⁴ Once Chimkent fell to the Russians in 1864, “the entire area was joined to Russia under the governorship of General

¹⁵⁸ Aleksandr Ètkind, *Internal Colonization : Russia’s Imperial Experience* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011), 121.

¹⁵⁹ Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1860–1917*, 61.

¹⁶⁰ Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1860–1917*.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁶² Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 56.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Cherniaev.”¹⁶⁵ Russia spent a decade to learn, as one policymaker found, that “to take nomads as subjects is much easier than to hold them in obedience.”¹⁶⁶ Russia now had a “line of garrisons” south of the Kazakh tribes and bordered against Khiva, Kokand, and Bukhara.¹⁶⁷

In an effort to calm the alarm Great Britain felt toward the Russian conquest, Russian Foreign Minister Mikhail Gorchakov issued a memorandum in November of 1864 stating that the

position of Russia in Central Asia is that of all civilized societies which are brought into contact with half-savage, nomad populations, possessing no fixed social organization ... the more civilized state is forced, in the interests of the security of its frontier and its commercial relations, to exercise a certain ascendancy over those whom their turbulent and unsettled character make most undesirable neighbors.¹⁶⁸

The problem Russia had was ambition in the form of military officers who wanted to make a name for themselves as well as the irascible political leadership of the Khanates. Almost immediately, military operations were mounted against Tashkent, which was taken by General Cherniaev in 1865.¹⁶⁹

The resistance Russian forces ran into were simply no match on the battlefield. When fighting, commanders would maneuver and fight independent of each other, with no single commander in charge. To complicate matters, these groups of fighters were divided by ethnic group.¹⁷⁰ In one instance, at the battle of Irjar May 1866, supposedly

¹⁶⁵ Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814–1914*, 168. For historical perspective, November 1864 is when Sherman began his march to the sea in an effort to make the Southern rebellious states capitulate to the Union during the American Civil War.

¹⁶⁶ I. F. Babkov, *Vospominaniia o moei sluzhbe v Zapadnoi Sibiri, 1859–1875*, as quoted in Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 56.

¹⁶⁷ Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814–1914*, 168.

¹⁶⁸ Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864–1914* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 45. Kazemzadeh translated the quoted passage. As quoted in Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 57.

¹⁶⁹ Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814–1914*, 169.

¹⁷⁰ Malikov, “The Russian Conquest of the Bukharan Emirate,” 185.

loyal units refused to fight alongside the main body of the Bukharan forces. It likely would not have mattered much as the Russian forces crushed the Bukharan army.¹⁷¹

The Russian Chief of Staff replaced General Cherniaev with General D. I. Romanovski who continued to take territory in Bukhara, eventually controlling the fertile Fergana Valley, then Ura-tiube along the Syr River by 1866.¹⁷² The Russian conquest continued nearly unabated through hundreds of battles and skirmishes. Sensing the need to disrupt Bukhara's growing influence in the region, Governor General Kaufman attacked and took Samarkand, followed by a destruction of Bukhara's army.¹⁷³ By 1869, Kokand and Bukhara were Russian protectorates.¹⁷⁴

A contemporary observer noted that "the steppe fortresses...have of late considerably lost in importance from the fact that there is no longer any danger of disturbance from the Kirghiz steppe, but far more, and almost exclusively, from the south, from Khiva and the steppe tribes who sympathize with the Khanate."¹⁷⁵ Governor General Kaufman was given the task of subjugating Khiva to "thereby gain control of the Amu River all the way to the Afghan frontier."¹⁷⁶ The well-planned attack on Khiva utilized five columns from five directions but was not without difficulty.¹⁷⁷ It became obvious Kaufman's forces were overwhelmingly powerfully compared to the Khivans—the Russians lost only 17 Soldiers—forcing Khiva to surrender to Russia in 1873.¹⁷⁸

Subjugation meted out at the end of a gun was the order of the day. In a report by Pichugin to General Skobelev, Pichugin states "we do not need a police force...[i]nstead

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Baumann, "Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan," 58.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 59.

¹⁷⁴ Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814–1914*, 169.

¹⁷⁵ Stumm, *Russia in Central Asia, The Expedition to Khiva*, 208.

¹⁷⁶ Baumann, "Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan," 63.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 64–65.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 68.

we need the bayonet, military dictatorship, and for responsibility to rest with a commander who has unlimited powers over a defined area.”¹⁷⁹

Although by 1875 Khokand was a *de facto* protectorate of the Russian Empire, internal regime change threatened the tacit loyalty of the elite and brought the fear of British-backed opposition to the Khanate.¹⁸⁰ During the political leadership turmoil, raiders from the Ferghana Valley were harassing Russian outposts.¹⁸¹ The Russian military responded to the abstract political danger and the immediate security threat by mounting a series of punitive raids, beginning with the Khoqandi sanctuary of the Ferghana Valley.¹⁸²

The fighting was as brutal as any during Russia’s century of conquest in Central Asia and the Caucasus. General Skobelev’s force defeated a large Khokandi force on their way into the Ferghana Valley. Then, the Russians struck out viciously for nearly a month as they captured many of the population centers, including the capital city.¹⁸³ A civilian on Governor General Kaufman’s staff wrote of General Skobelev that he “knew no bounds in [his] inhumane treatment of people” during the campaign.¹⁸⁴

Even though the punitive campaign against Khokand was successful in bringing about another treaty with the Khannate, Russia was unable to maintain much control over the area because of “internal strife and instability, in part fostered by the Russian presence.”¹⁸⁵ It was not simply the Russian presence that was causing disturbance, but rather the Russian brutality without the second half of General Skobelev’s policy: kindness after defeat.

¹⁷⁹ Sergei Abashin, “The ‘fierce Fight’ at Oshoba: A Microhistory of the Conquest of the Khoqand Khanate,” *Central Asian Survey* 33, no. 2 (2014): 221.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 217.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1860–1917*, 62.

¹⁸⁵ Morrison, “Introduction,” 137.

In response, Russia moved military garrisons into the area to control roads and passes from the Fergana valley but never had much success using their conventional forts and raids technique. Khokand rebels would find refuge in small groups among the population and strike at will at the Russians, then return to their safe areas.¹⁸⁶ This inability to control the supposedly subjugated people through conventional use of forces and fortresses caused the Russians to adapt tactics to the irregular foe.

Governor General Kaufman ordered that a local commander, Mirza Abdullah, raise a significant number of forces to “look after the safety of communications between” two outposts.¹⁸⁷ This local militia would eventually come under command of Colonel Pichugin who would combine rifle battalions, batteries of artillery, Cossack cavalry and local militia to form a raiding force which “carried out punitive operations in nearby villages on both banks of the” Syr-Darya river.¹⁸⁸

Colonel Pichugin decided to undertake the most significant of these punitive raids due to his growing concern of the support rebels were receiving from the surrounding mountainous region. He tailored his force for the raid, leaving behind his artillery to increase his mobility and speed, which was a departure from both the tactics of the time and lessons learned by the Russians in the Caucasus.¹⁸⁹ Colonel Pichugin also force marched his raiders overnight, arriving at the village of Oshoba at dawn on the 18th of November.¹⁹⁰ Although this move failed to achieve surprise, his forces quickly eliminated all resistance and razed the village before marching out of the mountains.¹⁹¹ The episode bears striking resemblance to Tolstoy’s *The Raid* and illustrates how much influence the campaign in the Caucasus still had on the Army.

What is more remarkable than Pichugin’s departure from the doctrine is the tenacity of resistance to the Russian force. In his own report to Governor General

¹⁸⁶ Abashin, “The ‘fierce Fight’ at Oshoba,” 217–18.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 218.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 219.

¹⁸⁹ Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1860–1917*, 52.

¹⁹⁰ Abashin, “The ‘fierce Fight’ at Oshoba,” 219.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

Kaufman, Pichugin states with some measure of surprise that “the women threw themselves with knives at the soldiers or threw stones at them from the roofs” and that “not one of the [rebels] would surrender.”¹⁹² What is clearly visible is the “alarming brutality of the Russian campaign of pacification” toward the end of nearly a century of warfare in the Caucasus and Central Asia.¹⁹³ Brutality was the norm and was doing the Russians no favors.

When the peace with Khiva was signed, it was incredibly favorable to Russia, just as the treaties with Bukhara and Kokand had been. Three years later, Russia put down an uprising in Kokand and in February 1876, Tsar Alexander II “proclaimed the annexation of the entire Kokand region.”¹⁹⁴ This had the effect of creating a more direct rule by Russia over the region. It also signaled to Britain that Russian primacy of involvement had been established north of the Amu-Darya.

In fact, around that same time, Britain was seeking approval to place governmental officials in Afghanistan to prevent the Russians from further encroachment. Russia eventually made a counter offer to the emir of Afghanistan “offering military training and promising to come to the aid of Afghanistan in the event of an invasion by a ‘foreign power’ whose identity was obvious.”¹⁹⁵

The Turkoman tribes in modern day Turkmenistan were the last to fall in Central Asia. Part of the delay in Russian attention was the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–78. The war once again showed St. Petersburg that, as compared to other European powers, Russia “was not in a financial and military sense the equal of her competitors.”¹⁹⁶ This was apparent, despite the fact the war was “even more successful” than the war of 1826–

¹⁹² Report of the commander of the Aq-Djar Froce [Pichugin] to the commander of the forces of the Turkestan military [Kaufman] 20/11/1875 TsGARUz F.I-715 Op.1 d.65 11.202-7, as quoted in Abashin, “The ‘fierce Fight’ at Oshoba,” 220.

¹⁹³ Morrison, “Introduction,” 137.

¹⁹⁴ Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 69.

¹⁹⁵ LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700–1917*, 133.

¹⁹⁶ Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814–1914*, 188.

28.¹⁹⁷ An exposure of such weakness only two decades after the same outcome of the Crimean War certainly stung Tsar Alexander II and the Russian psyche.

Despite the delay, Russia did send a military expedition into Transcaspia to subdue the Turkomans. The first expedition cornered the semi-nomadic Turkomans at the Geok Tepe fortress in the Teke oasis. Hubris on the part of the Russians led to a rushed attack and subsequent, brutal hand-to-hand combat. The Russians were forced to retreat in disorder after nearly 500 casualties.¹⁹⁸ Another operation was launched and the Turkomen again retreated to the fortress of Geok Tepe north of Ashkhabad. The Russians, not wanting a repeat of the previous engagement, laid classical siege to the fortress, finally breaching its walls and, after massive bombardment, proceeding to the assault.¹⁹⁹ Once inside, the Russians encountered less resistance than had been expected as thousands of Turkomen flooded the breaches trying to escape. Unfortunately for those in the fortress, “Russian cavalry pursued...and massacred combatants and noncombatants alike, killing some 8,000 in all. Approximately 6,500 Turkomans perished inside Geok Tepe,” meaning that some 1,500 were struck down outside the fortress walls.²⁰⁰ Russian losses for the day’s action were 59 killed.²⁰¹

Russian forces captured Merv shortly after the massacre of Geok Tepe in 1881.²⁰² As a result, Russia achieved its primary goal of intervention in Central Asia, namely having a stable, controllable boundary to its Southern Border.²⁰³ Russia had filled the so-called empty space. It had come as far south as Tsar Alexander II would allow, so as not to appear threatening to British India. Russia’s financial lagging, as demonstrated in both the Crimean War and the Russo-Turkish War, stood to improve

¹⁹⁷ LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700–1917*, 140.

¹⁹⁸ Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 72.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 73–74.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁰¹ Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 74.

²⁰² LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700–1917*, 131.

²⁰³ Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814–1914*, 169.

based on the monopoly over trade in the Caspian Sea.²⁰⁴ The outlook was positive for future leverage on Iran, which would give Russia greater leverage on Great Britain.²⁰⁵ There was fleeting hope of large economic development and exploitation, especially the hope that the area could be a source of raw cotton, which would challenge the British monopoly.²⁰⁶ Fortunately for Central Asia, Russia waited another 40 years before beginning the extraction of resources on the scale seen during the Soviet era. This was due, in part, to the cash-lacking government's unwillingness to invest in its new "colonial area adjacent to her own territory."²⁰⁷

2. Imperial Hubris

Under the affirmation of Tsar Alexander II, the Turkestan governor-generalship was established which centralized all military and civilian authority into a single leader.²⁰⁸ The Russian leadership moved deliberately and cautiously as they implemented Russian order and administration to the territories and oblasts. They wished to prevent a backlash like the Russians felt in the Caucasus. This style of administration blended well with how contemporaries viewed the problems they faced. As Stumm puts it,

[t]he conquests and acquisitions of territory, which followed so closely on one another, the continual expeditions and small campaigns against the restless border tribes, the moulding of so many new and entirely foreign elements, and the difficulty of communications with European Russia, all combined, threw many obstacles and impediments in the way of a completely organized system of administration.²⁰⁹

Even with the autocratic government under the Tsar, there was not the forcing function to get administrators and bureaucrats from Russia to Central Asia in a similar

²⁰⁴ LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700–1917*, 136.

²⁰⁵ Baumann, "Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan," 76.

²⁰⁶ Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy, 1814–1914*, 171.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Stumm, *Russia in Central Asia, The Expedition to Khiva*, 258.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 257.

way as there would be under the Soviet regime.²¹⁰ Some Russian colonization occurred, but it was only encouraged and not directly sponsored by the Russian government. The Russian governor-generalships established in Central Asia ensured that Russian citizens living abroad would be treated according to Russian law (and exceptionally favorable by the colonial regime as compared to natives under the same rule).²¹¹

What was to Russia an asset during the conquest of Central Asia, was a hindrance to its very own development as a protectorate. Russia was able to control five million people with only 31 battalions spread over three million square miles.²¹² It was able to achieve this incredible economy of force because of a lack of nationalist identity around which to coalesce a resistance to Russian rule and the undeveloped states of the tribes when Russia moved into Central Asia.²¹³ It is also plausible that the Russian approach was effective in building a deterrent to would-be insurgents. The unfortunate tradeoff was that Central Asia experienced less involvement by Russia, when compared to French or British protectorates around the globe, and therefore considerably less development.²¹⁴

Throughout the Great Game, Russia sought to enhance its standing through territorial acquisition or enlarging influence on its neighboring states. Inasmuch as control and influence kept other great powers out of Russia's sphere of influence, Russia was determined to ensure those buffer states remained a stable periphery. Throughout the winding course of the Great Game, Russia's officers and agents abroad consistently pursued a deliberate path to ensure greater control, and therefore greater stability, where it believed unrest or potential upheaval was a risk. One hears echoes of Putin's not-so-veiled threats to current Central Asian regime leaders.

²¹⁰ Baumann, "Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan."

²¹¹ Seymour Becker, *Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia Bukhara and Khiva, 1865–1924*, Russian Research Center Studies 54 (New York, NY: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 29–31.

²¹² Baumann, "Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan," 76.

²¹³ Becker, *Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia Bukhara and Khiva, 1865–1924*.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

In part, the need to continually advance and expand Imperial Russia's influence was driven by a "neurotic obsession amongst ruling elites with the maintenance of 'prestige'" and concern over Russia's great power status.²¹⁵ It was coupled with a significant air of superiority and prejudices—common to most colonial powers of the time—which meant that Russian leaders "did not see Central Asia's states as rational, but as savage, backward, unreliable, an amenable only to force."²¹⁶

Russia continuously justified intervention in foreign countries affairs by protecting Russian or Orthodox Christian populations. Both Russo-Turkish wars, the Crimean War and early intervention in Khiva can at least partly be traced back to Russia's stated desire to protect Russians or Christians. Such a pretext for war has amazing commonality to what was publicly stated with regard to the intervention in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Russia also found itself competing against nations with much deeper pockets, while simultaneously constantly working against financial limitations. From the scorched earth and destruction of Moscow during the Napoleonic campaign to the second Russo-Turkish war, Russia emerged militarily successful but economically vulnerable.

C. MILITARY LEGACY

Russia's initial forays into Central Asia were failures. Russian officers attempted to operate against an irregular enemy in a harsh environment without adapting. Officers with experience in the Caucasus, where adaptation was seen as necessary for quite some time, brought those tactics to the battle fields of Central Asia and adapted them further. The most significant adaptation was the departure from large expeditionary forces. The protection of the baggage train internal to the marching column, lightening the individual soldier's load via relaxed marching and uniform standards, the close formations for mutual protection were all novel adaptations in the face of an irregular enemy.

²¹⁵ Morrison, "Introduction," 137.

²¹⁶ Morrison Alexander, "Twin Imperial Disasters. the Invasions of Khiva and Afghanistan in the Russian and British Official Mind, 1839–1842," *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2014): 299.

The use of flying detachments of Cossacks throughout the entire Great Game episode is notable as it enabled Russia to use far fewer regular soldiers than it would have had to otherwise use. It also provided unmatched flexibility on the battlefield. The Cossacks were nearly as nimble as the nomads of the steppes but were equipped with modern weapons and military discipline. Although used in various ways throughout the century of warfare and expansion, Russia's use of the Cossacks as a loyal proxy element is obviously a tactic not abandoned in modernity.

The fact that Russian commanders were using forces purpose-built for certain missions—and that the commanders on the ground had the operational flexibility to do so—allowed those commanders to achieve unparalleled gains with relatively few forces. It also facilitated the economy of force strategy by allowing one force to be tailored and morphed into an appropriate organization to handle new and challenging circumstances as they arose. Both the operational flexibility and the organizational customizability of the Russian forces in Central Asia played a key part in Russian victory.

The strategy employed throughout most of the campaigns in Central Asia was the calculated and deliberate use of “shock and awe” followed by a broad and stoic peace. The choice to wage a certain style of warfare for psychological benefit thereof shows a depth of thought that is not often assumed when the Russian campaigns in Central Asia are studied. The choice is, however, exceedingly important in that the effect of the deliberate, initial brutality when coupled with kindness may have helped create a deterrent, again aiding the economy of force. The opposite is also evident when social issues were not addressed and Russian heavy handedness was not followed with compassion, insurrection and rebellion occurred.

Russia left Central Asia with a legacy of harsh autocratic government built on a single leader wielding incredible power. Imperial Russia yielded colonies to the Soviet Union which were ripe for plunder and exploitation, and later the Soviets did exactly that. Today, the mechanisms used by Russia to complete the conquest have their modern Russian doppelgangers, and may be useful to gaining a full understanding of Russian warfare.

IV. FRACTURED EMPIRE

A. IMPERIAL RUSSIA AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

The Russian empire began to disintegrate well before the Germans smuggled Nikolai Lenin (later Vladimir Ilich Lenin) into Russia to foment dissension and demoralize the Russian Army to the point its army would collapse on the Eastern front of the Great War.²¹⁷ Before Lenin and Trotsky assumed control over all of the various Socialist factions and began calling themselves the Bolshevik—or Majority—Party, there were decades of upheaval and turmoil in Russia.

Reform had been slow to come to Russia compared with the rest of Europe. Only in the 1860s was serfdom abolished in Imperial Russia, with little practical effect for most peasants' lives.²¹⁸ Later, the Industrial Revolution took labor from the fields and sent it to the factories which in turn created a series of food shortages and still did not improve most Russians' lives.²¹⁹ Years of a poor economy, exacerbated by the scarcity of common food items, and poor performance during the Russo-Japanese War brought these governance failures to a head in Russia.²²⁰ Calls for reform, representation, and elections grew, uniting various sects of the population. On Sunday, January 9th, 1905, protests all over St. Petersburg were put down and dispersed with volley after volley of rifle fire from Russian troops.²²¹

As it would later be called, Blood Sunday touched off a string of mass demonstrations, riots, and mutinies across Russia which would last over a year. Tsar Nicholas II made declarations and proposals in February which “he had intended as evidence of magnanimity” but were seen as “cowardice and weakness” which resulted in

²¹⁷ William Weir, *Guerrilla Warfare: Irregular Warfare in the Twentieth Century*, The Stackpole Military History Series. (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2008), 70.

²¹⁸ Frank W. Thackeray, *Events That Changed Russia since 1855* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 3–5, ABC-Clio <http://ebooks.abc-clio.com/?isbn=9780313089442>.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13–15.

²²⁰ Weir, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 69.

²²¹ John Davenport, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, Milestones in Modern World History; Milestones in Modern World History. (New York, NY: Chelsea House, 2010).

increasing tensions rather than alleviating them.²²² Eventually, Tsar Nicholas would deliver his October Manifesto, where during a speech on the evening of October 17th he outlined the creation of the State Duma and enumerated the rights of conscience, speech, assembly, and association.²²³

Although the proclamation was initially well received, instead of quelling the riotous attitudes it stimulated them.²²⁴ The Tsar enacted a campaign of military pacification, largely targeting the peasantry.²²⁵ The punishments were public and brutal and again served to increase (in places) the desire for workers and serfs to strike and protests.²²⁶ After a particularly brutal month of state repression, the issues were successfully forced underground, only to surface a decade later under the stress of World War I.²²⁷

B. IMPERIAL RUSSIA BREAKS UNDER STRESS

Russia unraveled under the pressure of years of bloody warfare with Germany during World War I. The war brought up the tensions which had been suppressed but not dealt with a decade earlier. Domestic turmoil under the pressure of a world war gave the opportunity to various groups in opposition to the Tsarist government. As historian Allen Chew summarized,

In March 1917 the centuries-old czarist autocracy collapsed under the pressure of war, corruption, and social and economic dislocation. The inept Provisional Government that replaced the monarchy, plagued by internal strife and lacking popular support for its efforts to continue the disastrous war, fell easy prey to a Bolshevik military coup in November 1917. Four months later the Bolsheviks made good their well-publicized promise to remove Russia from the war by concluding a separate peace treaty with Germany. This “betrayal” caused considerable consternation

²²² Sidney Harcave, *First Blood: The Russian Revolution of 1905*, English (London, UK: Bodley Head, 1965), 131.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 196–97.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 216.

²²⁵ Weir, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 68.

²²⁶ Harcave, *First Blood*, 230–33.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 242.

among Russia's former allies. They [the Allies] feared that Germany might transfer hundreds of thousands of troops from Russia to the western front, where the war was still raging. Also cause for alarm was the possibility that Allied war materiel in Russia might fall into German hands or be used by the Bolsheviks—who espoused the violent eradication of the existing international order—to consolidate their hold on the country.²²⁸

As Michel Garder characterized the situation, Russia had been “totally disorganized by three years of foreign war and an ensuing year of anarchy.”²²⁹ This left a significant power vacuum which the Bolsheviks filled with their Marxist government. As if the death and destruction of combat during the Great War was not enough, the legacy Russia inherited after the Bolshevik takeover was one of “mass violence” distributed across the entire society rather than concentrated at the front lines of a battlefield.²³⁰ As William Weir said of the Russian experience in World War I, “War was hell everywhere, but it was more hellish in Russian than anywhere else.”²³¹ The hellishness spread and increased during the civil war.

There was a conglomeration of anti-Bolshevik movements that formed the opposition. Because of disunion and lack of coordination, their message—everything from competing socialist voices to the so-called Green anarchist groups—was muddled and unclear, all the while making the Bolshevik message much clearer by comparison.²³²

From the October 1917 revolution placing the Bolsheviks in charge until peace was concluded with the Central Powers in March of 1918, the Russian military was generally supportive of Lenin's government.²³³ However, that is not to say the period

²²⁸ Allen F. Chew, *Fighting the Russians in Winter: Three Case Studies*, Leavenworth Papers; No. 5 (Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1981), 1, <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS58589>.

²²⁹ Michel Garder, *A History of the Soviet Army*, Praeger Publications in Russian History and World Communism (New York, NY: F.A. Prager, 1966), 38.

²³⁰ Peter Gatrell, “War after the War: Conflicts, 1919–23,” in *A Companion to World War I* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 569.

²³¹ Weir, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 69.

²³² Garder, *A History of the Soviet Army*, 38.

²³³ Steven J. Main, “Pragmatism in the Face of Adversity: The Bolsheviks and the Academy of the General Staff of the Red Army during the Russian Civil War, 1918–1921,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 8, no. 2 (1995): 334.

was without strife, turmoil, and bloodshed. In point of fact “widespread conflict took place between November 1917 and May 1918.”²³⁴

The Allied forces took note of the Bolsheviks’ desire to overthrow the world order. In a little-remembered piece of World War I history, the Allied Supreme War Council elected to invade Russia in 1918. This decision was made based on the progress of the allies, the desire to keep German forces out of Russia, and the series of destabilizing events inside Russia which threatened Western Europe.²³⁵

The Allied opposition to the Bolsheviks was not the only issue Lenin had to contend with. The Bolsheviks were fighting other Socialists, Finnish nationalists, and Russian elements near Arkhangel’sk (in addition to the allied forces); a Czechoslovakian Legion on the Volga; an anti-Bolshevik workers’ army in the Urals and Siberia; Don Cossacks and Ukrainian nationalists in the south; and “social revolutionaries,” “anarchists,” and various groups of anti-Bolshevik sentiment spread across the country.²³⁶ Regardless of the foe they faced, the Bolsheviks simplified the military task of winning the civil war by concentrating heavily on a single front at a time, initially the Northern and Eastern fronts, then the Southern front (the Soviets retrospectively listed the other major fronts as being the Caspian, Caucasian, and Western).²³⁷

1. Bolsheviks Take Their Gloves Off

In response to these threats, the Bolsheviks instituted a policy of Red Terror via Lenin’s secret police (the Cheka) in September 1917.²³⁸ “Workers who refused to work were arrested and drafted into the Red Army; peasants who refused to surrender grain were shot...soldiers who refused to fight were shot.”²³⁹ Lenin gave the Cheka nearly

²³⁴ Gatrell, “War after the War,” 559.

²³⁵ Joel Roscoe Moore, “The North Russian Expedition, the 85th Division’s Participation,” *Infantry Journal* XXIX, no. 1 (July 1926): 1–3, 21.

²³⁶ Garder, *A History of the Soviet Army*, 38–39.

²³⁷ Vasilii Danilovich Sokolovskii, ed., *Military Strategy : Soviet Doctrine and Concepts* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1963), 114.

²³⁸ Gatrell, “War after the War,” 558.

²³⁹ Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Behind the Front Lines of the Civil War: Political Parties and Social Movements in Russia, 1918–1922* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 21.

unrestrained power to enforce the Bolshevik will on the Russian people and military. So-called anti-revolutionaries were rounded up by the Cheka. Those who were not shot on the spot were placed in concentration camps.²⁴⁰

The actions of the Cheka, rounding up and shooting any opposition or deserters including whole Army regiments in some cases, signified that “[a]ll moral restraints were now cast aside. Anything was permissible in order to stay in power” for the Bolsheviks.²⁴¹ This understanding permeated every organ of the state Lenin employed, as well as the enemies they operated against. Everyone in Russia knew the game was being played for keeps. As the Red Army’s handbook stated: “our army is so called because it spills blood under the red flag...and therefore the color of our banner is the color of blood.”²⁴² As the conclusion of the Great War’s eastern front by the Brest-Litovsk Treaty allowed, the Bolsheviks were able to concentrate on internal threats and launched the country deeper into a terribly bloody civil war.

The burgeoning Soviet apparatus was flexible, following Lenin’s dictum of changing the methods to the conditions.²⁴³ Although the Red Army grew to five million by the end of the civil war, significant initial fighting was unconventional and conducted by irregulars.²⁴⁴ As the civil war progressed, partisan groups became indispensable to the Red Army’s progress in Ukraine and Siberia.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁰ The Cheka were in charge of the Gulag. Ibid., 20.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 21.

²⁴² Gatrell, “War after the War,” 560.

²⁴³ Sokolovskii, *Military Strategy*, 115.

²⁴⁴ Gatrell, “War after the War,” 567, 569.

²⁴⁵ Sokolovskii, *Military Strategy*, 121.

2. War in the North

Allied forces landed in the north and gave support to White Russian factions centered in Archangel.²⁴⁶ While the intervention was limited in scope (fewer 15,000 soldiers were employed by either side) and in duration (the expedition lasted from the Fall of 1918 to October 1919, which is strange because the armistice ending World War I was signed on the 11th of November, 1918)²⁴⁷ it does provide a few examples of how the Bolsheviks fought and employed irregular warfare.

In the northern campaign, neither the allies nor the Reds were particularly well equipped to fight in the waist deep snow and temperatures reaching double-digits below zero.²⁴⁸ As British General Sir Edmond Ironside noted, except for the Canadians, “[t]here were no troops trained to run on skis or snow-shoes” among the allied forces.²⁴⁹ Because both sides were unprepared for the terrain, they were both forced to rely on natives for logistical support and for adjunct guerrilla forces. General Ironside feared that the Bolsheviks “might be able to develop a vicious guerrilla warfare against” the allied forces.²⁵⁰ While the Bolsheviks did not entirely rely on irregular forces in the northern campaign (or any other campaign), irregulars were a critical component of it.

As the Red and White factions fought in the province, the battle lines solidified around the lines of communication in that Northern Province.²⁵¹ This created a porous line, perfectly susceptible to irregular raiding forces. Colonel Moore, the commander of

²⁴⁶ There were additional interventions of allied troops in Russia during the end and after the conclusion of World War I. The United States sent military forces into the Russian Far East in Siberia, Southern Russian, and the port of Vladivostok. For more information on the rest of the allied intervention in Russia as well as the politics of intervention at the end of World War I see David S. Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917–1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). and Betty Miller. Unterberger, *America's Siberian Expedition, 1918–1920: A Study of National Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1956).

²⁴⁷ Chew, *Fighting the Russians in Winter*, 1.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 15.

²⁴⁹ Sir Edmund Ironside, *Archangel, 1918–1919* (London, UK: Constable, 1953), 30.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 55.

²⁵¹ Liudmila G. Novikova, “Russia’s Red Revolutionary and White Terror, 1917–1921: A Provincial Perspective,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 65, no. 9 (2013): 1761.

the 339th Infantry, wrote that the front line “did not form a continuous line but were a series of occupied positions at vital points, more or less fortified.”²⁵²

Liudmila Novikova’s assessment is that the initial use irregular forces by the Bolsheviks in Arkhangel’sk province was limited because the Allied expeditionary force re-took the capital city in August 1918, and therefore maintained control of most of the province’s population (for two more years).²⁵³ While General Ironside suggests that the peasants “were anxious to free their own villages, but to free any other village was of little interest to them.”²⁵⁴ While the peasantry may have had limited desire to fight beyond their own villages, the Bolsheviks were keen to expand and consolidate control through any means. However, the main Bolshevik forces—the revolutionary elements of the Russian Army combined with the Red Guard—while full of enthusiasm, were drained by years of war and ranks filled with “self-formed, self-directed” units.²⁵⁵²⁵⁶ These units “were not suitable as a long-range military or militia force” without significant external pressure to perform.²⁵⁷

3. The Population Suffers, But Fights

Local peasantry living within striking distance of the battle lines suffered greatly. Villages were looted and exploited for “food, horses, cattle and fodder” as well as forced labor for the Red partisan units in Arkhangel’sk province.²⁵⁸ The Russian peasants found that they were unable to maintain their neutrality during the civil war. At best, villages could form organic guerrilla units and then give tacit allegiance to whichever master they

²⁵² Moore, “The North Russian Expedition, the 85th Division’s Participation,” 12.

²⁵³ Novikova, “Russia’s Red Revolutionary and White Terror, 1917–1921,” 1759.

²⁵⁴ Ironside, *Archangel, 1918–1919*, 29.

²⁵⁵ Rex A. Wade, *Red Guards and Workers’ Militias in the Russian Revolution* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1984), 311, 316–317, 319.

²⁵⁶ The Red Guard was a more or less spontaneous amalgamation of local militias that took up arms to protect the revolution and eventually fulfill security and police functions in support of the same. The Red Guard units would largely be assumed into the Red Army while its duties as internal police and security apparatus would be assumed by the Cheka. Timothy C. Dowling, ed., *Russia at War: From the Mongol Conquest to Afghanistan, Chechnya, and beyond* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 189–90.

²⁵⁷ Wade, *Red Guards and Workers’ Militias in the Russian Revolution*, 311.

²⁵⁸ Novikova, “Russia’s Red Revolutionary and White Terror, 1917–1921,” 1761.

were under. Peasants would then survive by conducting their own raids—one of the only ways to recapture enough foodstuffs to survive through winter—as well as provide local security.²⁵⁹ Many of the villagers who suffered at the hands of these marauding bandits-turned-partisans vowed to protect themselves and their villages in turn, thus growing the number of partisan elements on both sides but also increasing the extreme violence and brutality that characterized the Russian civil war. In fact, joining in on the raids became “a form of self-protection for the local peasantry.”²⁶⁰ It was also seen as a temporary allegiance by some of these groups, who deserted, defected or mutinied when it was favorable for them to do so.²⁶¹

For peasants living under the Whites, anything but active resistance was seen as guilt by association when Red forces prowled through the area. In addition to the burden imposed by looting and requisitioning food, arbitrary punishment and indiscriminate violence wrought by Red partisan elements became so severe that the 6th Red Army command had to take action to attempt to curtail the violence.²⁶²

Despite a few local partisan commanders’ censures, “these close-knit voluntary units constituted the backbone of the Bolshevik domination in the region, and the Red command often turned a blind eye to their atrocities.”²⁶³ The Bolsheviks’ need for total control was such that they were tolerant of any cost in human life and wanton violence. The Reds relied on them so much that they gave them “army food ration and monetary allowances” as well as a share of the loot from their successful raids.²⁶⁴ This allowance was most likely made because Bolshevik leadership was uncertain how to handle these independent forces upon which they relied so heavily.²⁶⁵ The benefits given to and the positive handling of these irregular forces was the nascent stages of an answer to the

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 1763.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Moore, “The North Russian Expedition, the 85th Division’s Participation,” 11, 21.

²⁶² Novikova, “Russia’s Red Revolutionary and White Terror, 1917–1921,” 1762.

²⁶³ Ibid., 1763.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Wade, *Red Guards and Workers’ Militias in the Russian Revolution*, 327–29.

‘military question’—or how the Bolsheviks would re-tool the Red Army so that it was more firmly under the thumb of the political apparatus.²⁶⁶

Once formed, most partisan groups were centered on the defense of their home villages. Some groups were motivated to oppose the Bolsheviks by religion, and a few were led by Orthodox Priests.²⁶⁷ Just as the Bolshevik forces found out that the Red Guard forces were ill-suited to operations, these primary motivating factors for White partisans meant that when they were ordered to support the White Army in other locations, they deserted in droves, hampering the conventional force they were tasked with supporting.²⁶⁸ They could also be exceptionally brutal.

4. Irregulars Incorporated

Initially, the Whites were less supportive of the violent, semi-independent, irregular forces materializing along the front, perhaps because of the allied support and felt lack of necessity. The effectiveness of the irregulars on the battlefield eventually drove the acceptance of partisan elements by the Whites.²⁶⁹ For the partisans themselves, the motivation was remarkably similar to those who were fighting for the Bolsheviks. The peasants-turned-guerrilla fighters wanted to protect their villages, recoup enough looted foodstuffs to ensure survival and seek revenge for previous injuries.²⁷⁰ The White headquarters also began to offer food and money for the services rendered by the partisan bands.²⁷¹ There were, however, significant costs to using these extremely violent elements.

²⁶⁶ Steven J. Main, “‘We Are Not Slaves, Slaves We Are Not...’ – the Role of the Red Army’s Political Apparatus in Combating Illiteracy during the Russian Civil War (1918–1921),” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 9, no. 3 (September 1, 1996): 594, doi:10.1080/13518049608430254.

²⁶⁷ Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–1929* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 67.

²⁶⁸ Novikova, “Russia’s Red Revolutionary and White Terror, 1917–1921,” 1764.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 1764–65.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 1764.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

One report after a skirmish with a Red patrol stated that the 19 captured “died after interrogation”²⁷² Another report acknowledged the 58 captured Red Army soldiers were “liquidated.”²⁷³ In a particularly gory scene, the White government in Arkhangel’sk “received reports of ice holes in the Pechora River that were filled with the frozen bodies of Bolshevik sympathizers and Red Army soldiers killed by the White partisans.”²⁷⁴ To be fair, the Whites and their irregulars—to the extent they could control them—did not have a monopoly on brutality or violence during the civil war, but the Whites’ cause probably suffered to a greater extent because of it.

The unintended consequence of this level of unchecked brutality was that it cut off the flow of deserters from the Red Army to the Whites.²⁷⁵ It also provided the Bolsheviks with copious propaganda opportunities to exploit, which they were more adept at exploiting in the first place.²⁷⁶ Although the White leadership in Arkhangel’sk headquarters attempted in vain to stop the terror by the partisan units, it would have little effect on what was happening along the front. The White authorities would “tolerate the partisans’ brutality because the White defense heavily relied on these voluntary guerrilla units.”²⁷⁷

Despite the limits of peasants-turned-partisans, the Red Army soon began to rely on ski detachments of partisan forces for raids and reconnaissance operations. The Communist forces found that the local partisans were much more mobile than the Red Army’s conventional forces. During one operation, partisans captured the sentries guarding an allied garrison. The partisans then guided the Red Army force to their objective, achieving a complete route of the French and White Russian troops.²⁷⁸ Another episode witnessed a particularly brutal operation by Bolshevik irregulars dressed

²⁷² Ibid., 1765.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 63–65.

²⁷⁷ Novikova, “Russia’s Red Revolutionary and White Terror, 1917–1921,” 1765.

²⁷⁸ Chew, *Fighting the Russians in Winter*, 5.

in peasant's clothes. They approached the sentries as peasants but then the guards were "coldly butchered" with axes, save one survivor who was taken prisoner.²⁷⁹

Another Red Army operation used larger partisan detachments as a reconnaissance and raiding force. Detachments of 150 partisans, which were more mobile than their conventional counterparts, were given independent military objectives that supported the main army's operation, but were geographically too dispersed to be handled by the main force.²⁸⁰ Similarly, Bolshevik forces used "marauding parties...far in our rear" to disrupt allied lines of communication.²⁸¹ They were also used in much smaller bands to scout and gather intelligence.²⁸² These independent forces, conducting independent but supporting operations echo the flying columns of irregular forces Davydov used to whittle away the French army.

In addition to direct combat support roles, the Red army used partisan forces to prepare advanced supply stores in key locations. This included food and ammunition as well as medicine and fodder for pack animals.²⁸³ Even though the Red army (as well as the allied forces) were exposed to the partisan's use of felt-lined boots, skis, winter camouflage, and snowshoes, it took quite some time and probably an unnecessary expenditure of lives for the Red Army leadership to acknowledge the necessity of incorporating specialized arctic weather training into the army.²⁸⁴

This independence streak was a sticking point for the communists. Many units which tacitly professed loyalty to the Bolshevik cause were only concerned with local matters, and "often disregarded an order from Trotsky, the People's Commissar of

²⁷⁹ Joel R. Moore, Harry H. Mead, and Lewis E. Jahns, *The History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviks: Campaigning in North Russia 1918–1919* (Detroit, MI: The Polar Bear Publishing Company, 1920), 144, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gdc/scd0001.00019207900>.

²⁸⁰ Chew, *Fighting the Russians in Winter*, 10.

²⁸¹ Moore, Mead, and Jahns, *The History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviks: Campaigning in North Russia 1918–1919*, 144.

²⁸² Ironside, *Archangel, 1918–1919*, 90–91.

²⁸³ Chew, *Fighting the Russians in Winter*, 10.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

War.”²⁸⁵ The specter of disobedience and questionable loyalty would greatly affect Soviet leadership in the interwar period and the mechanism they would use to control partisans during World War II. As Kenneth Slepyan put it, their “experience with partisan warfare during the Civil War had demonstrated that partisans were impossible to control and that their political reliability could not be guaranteed.”²⁸⁶

C. FORESHADOWING AND OPPORTUNITY COSTS

In the southern campaign, partisan activity behind the lines of the White forces played “an important part” in supporting the Red Army.²⁸⁷ The partisan effort in the south was a much more accurate foreshadowing of how the Soviets would attempt to use partisan forces during the Second World War. The Bolsheviks took advantage of the harsh treatment the Whites imposed on Bolshevik sympathizers, and leveraging loyal political officers, conducted unconventional warfare by inserting agents into Crimea to link up with these disenfranchised populations behind the White forces.²⁸⁸ In one example, Comrade Mokrousov, “the organizer of the revolutionary movement in the Crimea,” was in charge of several hundred partisans within weeks of being inserted behind the Whites.²⁸⁹

The advancing Red Army “supplied detailed directives to Ukrainian partisans” in an attempt to coordinate partisan operations with the Red Army’s advance. Partisans were used to scout for advancing units as well as “capture and retain important bases and railroad lines, disrupt the enemy’s line of retreat, and prevent the enemy from destroying” lines of communication “in the path of the advancing forces.”²⁹⁰

²⁸⁵ Weir, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 72.

²⁸⁶ Kenneth Slepyan, *Stalin’s Guerrillas: Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 15.

²⁸⁷ Sokolovskii, *Military Strategy*, 122.

²⁸⁸ A. S. Bubnov et al., eds., *The Civil War of 1918–1920, Study of the Strategic Operations of the Red Army*, trans. Charles Berman, vol. Volume III (Leningrad: Soviet Military Publications Division, 1930), 690.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, Volume III:691.

²⁹⁰ Sokolovskii, *Military Strategy*, 122.

While the Whites attempted to link their forces in the south with anti-Soviet forces in Poland, the endeavor failed.²⁹¹ The isolated Whites continued to resist, but eventually were defeated. The Soviet history records that this “was the result of the accumulation of Soviet forces in this sector of the front and the improvement in their combat efficiency.”²⁹² While true, the Bolshevik use of irregular units behind the Whites’ lines in Ukraine was significant to the extent that it foreshadowed how Soviet partisans would be used during World War II. Trusted political agents would be inserted to ensure Soviet allegiance of the occupied peoples and coordinate supporting operations with the Red Army.

The Polish-Soviet War of 1919–1920 “profoundly affected the Red Army. In the short term, it was a painful humiliation. In the long term, it was the spur to self-improvement” prior to the Second World War.²⁹³ It was a theater where Charles de Gaulle, Wladyslaw Sikorski, and Mikhail Tukhachevsky all participated and which “provided an important stimulus to their thinking.”²⁹⁴ It was a theater of conflict which relied greatly upon mobility and irregulars. Poles regularly used partisan bands to screen their lines, and in one instance, used “a wave of partisan raids on the Soviet rear” to paralyze a significant Soviet force.²⁹⁵

De Gaulle’s impression of the Polish-Soviet War left him with the sense that technology would allow forces to combine the high mobility of that theater with the firepower seen in the trench warfare of World War I.²⁹⁶ Sikorski’s experience led him to correctly outline in *Przyszla Wojna* (The Future War) how Hitler’s Wehrmacht would use tanks during blitzkrieg.²⁹⁷ Although Tukhachevsky was somewhat isolated politically

²⁹¹ Bubnov et al., *The Civil War of 1918–1920, Study of the Strategic Operations of the Red Army*, Volume III:718.

²⁹² Ibid., Volume III:719.

²⁹³ Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919–20* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1972), 277.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 268.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 108, 122.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 269.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

within the Soviet hierarchy, his ideas were eventually published—30 years after they were written in 1931.²⁹⁸ Each of these military thinkers drew insight from the irregular tactics, the speed and the mobility they each experienced during the Polish-Soviet War.

In addition to the other major campaigns, the Bolsheviks faced the Basmachi revolt, other counter-revolutionary obstacles and the threat of British in Central Asia.²⁹⁹ The Basmachi movement, which had been smoldering for some time, gained significant support in 1920 in the Ferghana valley.³⁰⁰ Promised reforms were never carried out by the Soviet government and these causes quickly became a rallying cry for disenfranchised locals across Central Asia.³⁰¹ The Bolsheviks were forced by a Muslim army to give up control of the countryside around Tashkent, and nearly lost the city itself.³⁰²

In the initial stages of revolt, the Basmachi ranks were flooded with ex-Red Army Muslim soldiers who defected.³⁰³ After conventional Soviet forces' pacification efforts failed, the Soviet leadership decided to create "detachments of 'Soviet Basmachis'" that were able to fight the natives in the native style.³⁰⁴ The attempt failed, as "they suddenly turned their weapons against the authorities" in an episode evocative of the so-called green-on-blue that would plague the United States in Afghanistan.³⁰⁵

By 1922, after years of hard fighting, the Soviets had pacified the Fergana valley and killed their leader Enver Pasha (who was originally the Soviet choice to lead a force against the Basmachi), forcing much of the movement to the fringes of Central Asia.³⁰⁶ It took Russia over 100,000 soldiers and over a decade, (as well as the complete political

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 269–70.

²⁹⁹ Edward. Allworth, ed., *Central Asia, 130 Years of Russian Dominance: A Historical Overview*, 3rd ed., Central Asia Book Series (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 230.

³⁰⁰ Bubnov et al., *The Civil War of 1918–1920, Study of the Strategic Operations of the Red Army*, Volume III:817.

³⁰¹ Allworth, *Central Asia, 130 Years of Russian Dominance*, 250–51.

³⁰² Dowling, *Russia at War*, 101.

³⁰³ Ibid., 102.

³⁰⁴ Allworth, *Central Asia, 130 Years of Russian Dominance*, 251.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Bubnov et al., *The Civil War of 1918–1920, Study of the Strategic Operations of the Red Army*, Volume III:835.

reorganization of the governments in Central Asia) to finally extinguish the Basmachi in 1933.³⁰⁷

How the Soviets dealt with the Basmachi revolt is significant in that it shows the opportunity cost associated with failing to incorporate the local people into governance or to address their concerns and grievances. Much of the eventual success the Soviets had was due to Lenin's economic policies toward the region coupled with a toleration of Muslim institutions.³⁰⁸ Had these measures been enacted during the Bolshevik revolution, when the peoples of Central Asia were demanding them, the Soviets could have likely prevented much of the consternation and revolt they instead fostered by their heavy-handed tactics.

D. CONCLUSION

The last half-century of Imperial Russia saw the gap between the elite and the peasant in Russia narrow little, even though much change had come to Russia and the Russian economy.³⁰⁹ With the losses during the Russo-Japanese War and the domestic revolt in 1905–06 the Russian government was shaken, but not defeated. World War I brought the final blow to the Russia Empire. The Great War created the void revolutionaries were looking for; it weakened the “material strength of the government and the will of the men” who governed to hold back the tide of change.³¹⁰

The Russian people suffered immensely under the pressures of the Great War and the social upheaval-turned-revolution afterward. The violence and destruction were such that it unraveled Russian society and paved the way for the Bolshevik revolution. The years of internal strife and external conflict before the civil war removed any holds on the levels of violence that were to be used during the civil war.³¹¹

³⁰⁷ Dowling, *Russia at War*, 101–2.

³⁰⁸ Allworth, *Central Asia, 130 Years of Russian Dominance*, 253.

³⁰⁹ Hugh. Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire, 1801–1917*, Oxford History of Modern Europe; Oxford History of Modern Europe. (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1967), 731.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 735.

³¹¹ Dowling, *Russia at War*, 948–49.

Because the military apparatus had been worn so thin and the population stretched to breaking, the Russian civil war devolved into a massive, bloody brawl, spread across the country. Irregular forces on both sides operated in this context without much (or any) restraint or control from a headquarters or central government.

The Whites were disorganized and uncoordinated, attempting to hold together or reconstruct various vestiges of governance which failed Russia up to that point. There was no central voice for the Whites. The separate fronts during the civil war had “no means of communicating with each other.”³¹² There were no consolidated offenses, and there was, at least initially, a hesitancy to use partisans or other irregulars, at a time when any and every opposition to the Bolsheviks was needed.

Both sides succumbed to the military temptation to replace strategy with violence to cow the opposition and subdue the population. In the case of the Whites in the north, reliance on irregulars to mete out indiscriminate violence limited and then stopped Red soldiers defecting.³¹³ At the same time, this provided the Bolsheviks with ample propaganda tying White leadership to “corruption, elitism, and brutality, everything that was repressive about Imperial Russia.”³¹⁴ This was, even more, the case with the Bolsheviks, as they not only brutalized any opposition but often their own units or population if the support rendered to the revolution was not vehement enough.

The Bolsheviks were able to leverage a decade of preparation against an embattled, crumbling political structure. The fanatical Bolshevik leadership accepted wholesale violence against every enemy in an effort to sustain their revolution and impose their Marxists ideology. The Bolshevik strategy “did not pursue limited objectives, but aimed at the total destruction of the enemy.”³¹⁵

Thus, militarily, they were opportunistic enough to use whatever forces they could muster to defeat every enemy or opponent they had. This included the use of

³¹² Ironside, *Archangel, 1918–1919*, 201.

³¹³ Novikova, “Russia’s Red Revolutionary and White Terror, 1917–1921,” 1765.

³¹⁴ Dowling, *Russia at War*, 937.

³¹⁵ Sokolovskii, *Military Strategy*, 113.

various types of irregular forces filling gaps and important adjunct roles for a tattered Red Army and fledgling Bolshevik state apparatus.

Out of the necessity to consolidate control, they tolerated the independent nature of some of these groups, later purging dissidents and carrying forward the lessons in the partisan operations of the Great Patriotic War. During the revolution, the irregulars bolstered the Communist regime and secured their government in a way that no regular force then organized could have.

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V. PARTISANS IN THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR

Unconventional warfare has gained in importance along with the increase in range and destructiveness of weapons. It was a particularly potent factor in several theaters of operations during World War II, but in none did it play a more significant role than on the Eastern front during that conflict. There the guerrilla movement behind the Axis forces gained in importance as the Soviet Army withdrew deeper and deeper into its homeland.

— Edgar M. Howell in
*The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941–1944*³¹⁶

A. CONTEXT IN THE EUROPEAN THEATER OF WORLD WAR TWO

The Second World War was truly global. Each front of the war had unique and challenging aspects. On the German's Eastern Front, the vast territory and sheer numbers of combatants provided a backdrop which, in places, favored irregular military operations. Such was the case during Operation Barbarossa. Germany's invasion force stretched itself into the vastness of European Russia while much of the Red Army withdrew, evaporated, was captured or was destroyed. The advance of the German army provided ample opportunity for Russian irregular warfare in the occupied territories. Even though the conditions favored guerrilla warfare, the opportunity was at first squandered.

Like the war itself, the size and scope of activities of partisans, guerrillas, and insurgents in the Second World War was enormous. This work will only consider the partisan operations of the Russo-German conflict. Even the topic of partisan operations along the Eastern front is broad and deep. As one author characterized the factors facing the German forces, "the Soviet borderlands essentially constitute an enormous...range of different social and cultural conditions, and" thus met with "varying degrees of success in

³¹⁶ Edgar M. Howell, *The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941–1944*. (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1956), iii.

counter-insurgency forces' efforts to exploit them.”³¹⁷ To simplify this topic even further, this chapter does not distinguish between the factions that fought both the German and Soviet forces, at times creating a three-way war.³¹⁸ Nor will it attempt to illuminate the significant differences between Soviet partisans and Ukrainian nationalists³¹⁹—or any number of other factions fighting the Germans (or Soviets)³²⁰—except to acknowledge the distinctions are real, important, and beyond the scope of this work. Instead, the chapter will rely on the oversimplification of the Soviet partisan against the German army.

1. The Call For Sacrifice

An interesting wrinkle in history has allowed, in this instance, for the loser to write much of what is available to the English-speaking world. Most of the first-hand reports available in English come in the form of captured and translated German documents or operational summaries compiled after the war by German practitioners at the direction of the Allies.³²¹ These reports allow for an interesting, albeit biased, window into the counterinsurgent's thoughts about and actions against the Soviet partisans. As for the Soviet narratives, the accounts of partisan operations adhered strictly to the party line for most of the duration of the Soviet Union.³²²

³¹⁷ Ben Shepherd and Juliette Pattinson, “Partisan and Anti-Partisan Warfare in German-Occupied Europe, 1939–1945: Views from Above and Lessons for the Present,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 5 (October 1, 2008): 687, doi:10.1080/01402390802197803.

³¹⁸ For a brief introduction to partisan groups across the entire Eastern Front see Nigel Thomas and Peter Abbott, *Partisan Warfare 1941–45*, Men-At-Arms (Hong Kong: Osprey Publishing, 1983).

³¹⁹ For more on the differences between partisan and nationalist fighters in the case of Ukraine see O. A. Zarubinsky, “The ‘red’ Partisan Movement in Ukraine during World War II: A Contemporary Assessment,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 9, no. 2 (June 1, 1996) and Petro R. Sodol, *UPA: They Fought Hitler and Stalin : A Brief Overview of Military Aspects from the History of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, 1942–1949* (New York, NY: Committee for the World Convention and Reunion of Soldiers in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, 1987).

³²⁰ In addition to the afore mentioned Ukraine case, whole volumes are dedicated to the guerrilla warfare in Poland, Yugoslavia, Italy, France, etc., in the European theater during World War II.

³²¹ *Department of the Army Pamphlet 20–240, Rear Area Security in Russia : The Soviet Second Front behind the German Lines*, German Report Series (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1951), v, 3–4.

³²² Keith Simpson, “The German Experience of Rear Area Security on the Eastern Front 1941–45,” *The RUSI Journal* 121, no. 4 (December 1, 1976): 39, doi:10.1080/03071847609421278.

An internal report put out by the German Army High Command in February 1942 characterizes Russian soldiers as having “an unheard-of absence of need, making them more independent of supplies than we are.”³²³ One German soldier remarked of his adversary “the Russian soldier proved to be an extremely tough adversary who...could endure the most adverse of conditions.”³²⁴ The same German Army High Command report later concluded that two characteristics of Russian personality impacted heavily on the partisans Germany faced, namely the

[e]xtraordinary apathy in bearing all kinds of sufferings, and a naturally-endowed absence of needs. These characteristics alone make it possible for Russian leaders to force the soldiers...to hold out to the point of self-sacrifice. They frequently ignore every consideration of the factors of physical and mental weakness, and enable the command to carry out its intentions stubbornly and brutally. Treachery, craftiness, cruelty, lack of regard even for a defenseless enemy, and complete indifference for their own lives, greatly help them. Men and equipment are recklessly sacrificed if the situation requires.³²⁵

The German perspective of their bitter foe was not without reason. Published in the last few weeks of 1941, *The Partisan's Companion* is a pocket-sized pamphlet produced to give “portable training and knowledge in survival and offensive capabilities” to the would-be Soviet Partisan.³²⁶ The pamphlet's introduction goes further than simply offering advice on combat tactics. It gives the political and ideological underlayment for the sacrifice the reader will be called on to make. The introduction states “[t]he purpose of your life is to justify devotion to the party. Your life, until the last breath, until the last drop of blood, belongs to the party.”³²⁷ *The Partisan's Companion* continues, stating that

³²³ A. V. Jacobs, trans., “Translation of German Manual on Peculiarities of Russian Warfare” (New York: Engineer Research Office, 1942), 2, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p4013coll8/id/3350>.

³²⁴ Gottlob Herbert Bidermann, *In Deadly Combat: A German Soldier's Memoir of the Eastern Front*, trans. Derek S. Zumbro (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 115.

³²⁵ Jacobs, “Peculiarities of Russian Warfare, Revised Edition.,” 4. Underlined text in the original.

³²⁶ Paul J. Schmitt, trans., *The Partisan's Companion: Deadly Techniques of Soviet Freedom Fighters During World War II* (Boulder, CO: Paladin Press, 2005).

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

[t]he suddenness of the attack, the accuracy of firing, the knife's blow, a bold and daring maneuver, confidence in one's own forces, and the preparation to take any suffering for the motherland in battle either on the march or in the hated enemy's hands, are the distinguishing characteristics of the Soviet partisan.³²⁸

It is no surprise, then, that the German High Command held the opinion it did in 1942 when one considers the language and exhortations of Josef Stalin, the political officers of the Red Army, and *The Partisan's Companion*.

2. Soviet Self-Imposed Hindrances

Stalin's July 3, 1941 speech demanding that the Soviet population "foment guerrilla warfare everywhere, to blow up bridges and roads, damage telephone and telegraph lines" was fiery but did little to organize effective resistance.³²⁹ Early partisan warfare was plagued by "ineptness of action (lack of experience), losses, a considerable degree of collaboration with the Germans by the population and the collapse of the territorial organization set up by the Soviet regime."³³⁰ The reason for such a detrimental start was simple. Stalin feared partisan success within the country. He learned from the Bolshevik Revolution that partisans could be effective militarily but had to be kept loyal to the cause.³³¹

Stalin's authoritarian rule crippled preparations even before the war began. Stalin's purges in the 1930s, as well as the Soviet doctrine shift, meant that the preparations for partisan warfare on Soviet territory were eliminated well before Operation Barbarossa.³³² In true Soviet fashion, the preparations were not simply stopped, they were erased. The later appointed chief of partisan operations, Panteleimon Ponomarenko, stated retrospectively that

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Alexander Hill, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941–45: A Documentary Reader* (Routledge, 2008), 49–52.

³³⁰ J. K. Zawodny, "Soviet Partisans," *Soviet Studies* 17, no. 3 (January 1966): 368.

³³¹ Simpson, "The German Experience of Rear Area Security on the Eastern Front 1941–45," 41.

³³² Hill, *The War Behind the Eastern Front*, 12.

[d]espite a rich tradition and experience of partisan warfare and underground activity in previous wars, we did not have a single academic work putting this experience in context. The preparations being carried out during peacetime for partisan warfare were cut short in the mid-1930s, and caches of weapons, supplies and technical equipment created for this end were liquidated.³³³

Even worse, “most able-bodied male Communists were usually the first to respond to mobilization calls to join the Red Army...consequently, it was the less physically fit who joined the partisan bands,” and who were available for conscription later.³³⁴ The remaining Party members, especially in the countryside where resistance would be easiest, were “often unfamiliar with the local conditions,” and often sent because of their Communist rather than guerrilla credentials.³³⁵ These local Party leaders not only “lacked proper weapons” but also “found little support from the surrounding Soviet populations.”³³⁶ In 1941, this relatively avoidable *faux pas* led to several hard years for the Soviet partisan operations.

B. GERMAN FAILURE OF INSIGHT AND APPROACH

If the Soviets did little to prepare effectively for and instigate guerrilla warfare behind an advancing German army, the Germans did less to capitalize on the relatively warm reception they received in many places along the Eastern front. The Germans failed to capitalize on the harsh treatment of many groups under the Soviets during the inter-war period. This was due to Hitler’s goal of destroying the Soviet Army as quickly as possible, which in turn meant that “whatever success the partisans might achieve in controlling territory or influencing the population was insignificant,” as long as it did not detract from the operations at the front.³³⁷ As one German intelligence officer stated in December 1941, “although Soviet citizens had been willing to support the Germans, the

³³³ Hill, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941–45*, 193.

³³⁴ Slepyan, *Stalin’s Guerrillas*, 30.

³³⁵ Kenneth D. Slepyan, “‘The People’s Avengers’: Soviet Partisans, Stalinist Society and the Politics of Resistance, 1941 - 1944” (PhD Diss, University of Michigan, 1994), 43.

³³⁶ Slepyan, *Stalin’s Guerrillas*, 30–32.

³³⁷ John A. Armstrong, ed., *Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 6.

unit's occupation policies...were leading to an increasing anti-German sentiment.”³³⁸ The Germans clearly missed a classic counterinsurgency opportunity. John Armstrong points out that the Germans “utterly failed to take advantage of the chance thus offered for winning over the Soviet population.”³³⁹

Even if German leadership recognized the anti-Soviet prevailing attitude of many within the occupied territory—and capitalized on the open-arms welcome they received in some locations such as the Baltic states and eastern Ukraine³⁴⁰—they still would have found themselves vulnerable in most of the occupied Russian territory due to their ideologically driven dealings with the locals and local government of the occupied areas. The German interaction with the occupied territory was implemented by the *Goldfasanen* (Golden Pheasant), the pejoratively described German ministers who lacked the “specialized knowledge and training” required to administer government in occupied territory.³⁴¹

The fact that the Germans systematically destroyed, rather than co-opted, much of the existing governmental structure at the time of occupation made sure Germany would have to “rely on natives for tasks of everyday administration and policing.”³⁴²³⁴³ The blatant overlooking of security, “allegiance of the population, maintenance of institutional patterns or the traditional social system” gave the Soviet partisan a point of access to the population that should have been denied by the German occupation

³³⁸ Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas*, 39.

³³⁹ Armstrong, *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, 321.

³⁴⁰ Nik Cornish, *Partisan Warfare on the Eastern Front 1941–1944: Rare Photographs from Wartime Archives* (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Military, 2013), 24.

³⁴¹ Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945: A Study of Occupation Policies* (Boulder, CO: Macmillan, 1957), 101–3.

³⁴² B. Shepherd and J. Pattinson, eds., *War in a Twilight World: Partisan and Anti-Partisan Warfare in Eastern Europe, 1939–45* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 13.

³⁴³ Although the policies of Nazi occupation in the Soviet Union and the U.S. led invasion of Iraq in 2003 are wildly different, they both suffered from the failure to incorporate the available manpower. In the case of Hitler, he was unwilling to incorporate ex-soviets into the Nazi apparatus (until very near the end of World War II). In the case of Iraq, the U.S. was unwilling to allow Baathists to continue to serve post-invasion. See John A. Armstrong, ed., *Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964) and Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945: A Study of Occupation Policies* (Macmillan, 1957).

force.³⁴⁴ Nazi ideology brought to the eastern front ideas like *Untermensch* (The Subhuman) which were used by Nazi leaders and Nazi propaganda to justify the extermination of “Jews, Communist leaders, and other undesirables.”³⁴⁵ Nazi ideology was the reason German leadership were unwilling to listen to suggestions such as “the population [in occupied Soviet territory] could easily be split from the Soviet and attached to the German cause” and that significant military effort was expended “not by military necessity but purely by ideological considerations.”³⁴⁶

The Germans’ dismissal of the usefulness of the occupied Slavic countries—except in their use as a source of materials and slave labor—bore fruit, over time, for the Soviets.³⁴⁷ Soviet partisans were, therefore, able to perform “one service of incalculable importance for the Soviet system,” without much of a competing German narrative, namely, “they maintained the Soviet presence in the occupied territories.”³⁴⁸

Theo Schulte states that the German policy of collective reprisal measures and the ability to execute suspected insurgents in the field without access to any justice proceedings was the “most damning indictment” of Wehrmacht policies in its rear areas.³⁴⁹ Perhaps the Army Group Center Rear Area pamphlet issued in October 1941 demanding that partisans be “utterly annihilated” is worthy of Schulte’s rebuke, as well as other similarly harsh orders given during this period.³⁵⁰ In any case, the end result was the same. German Army divisions recorded body counts in the thousands and tens-of-thousands of partisans shot in October and November 1941.³⁵¹

³⁴⁴ Armstrong, *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, 6–7.

³⁴⁵ Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941–1945*, 73.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 73, 507.

³⁴⁷ Armstrong, *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, 6–7.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁴⁹ Theo J. Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (New York, NY: Berg, 1989), 117–18.

³⁵⁰ Ben Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 89.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 84–85.

The German leadership squandered the opportunity presented them by Stalin's harsh treatment of his own population. By not exploiting the rift between leader and population and then harshly treating an entire population for activities which were limited to the "'shareholders' of the Soviet system,"³⁵² they fomented rebellion rather than pacified the population. German failure to see the vulnerability created behind their lines due to their harsh treatment of the population is matched by the early ineffectiveness of the partisan units as they tried to survive the first winter of their war.

C. EARLY PARTISAN OPERATIONS – FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

Even with such treatments being leveled by the Germans, the partisans' ability to garner the population's support varied widely across the Eastern front. Ideology, leadership, and operational areas were key factors in determining the success of the relationship between the partisan group and the local population.³⁵³ More often than not, the match was poor, or the local Soviet leadership was guided by "disregard of suffering, which was viewed as necessary for war purposes."³⁵⁴

Part of the reason for the poor match between partisan leader and population was the simple variety of locations where the partisans (and their leadership) came from early in the war. As one Soviet officer complained in July 1941, groups were being "knocked together hurriedly" and put into active service behind German lines "after their members knew each other for only a few hours."³⁵⁵ It was hardly an environment which fostered unit cohesion or readiness. Party members, NKVD (The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) officials, and Red Army officers all became partisan leaders.³⁵⁶ Just as their backgrounds were varied, so was their experience, with most having little to no practical knowledge of how to wage a guerrilla campaign.³⁵⁷ Couple the leadership's

³⁵² Simpson, "The German Experience of Rear Area Security on the Eastern Front 1941–45," 42.

³⁵³ Shepherd and Pattinson, *War in a Twilight World*, 17.

³⁵⁴ Armstrong, *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, 7.

³⁵⁵ Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas*, 31.

³⁵⁶ Armstrong, *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, 76.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 81–83.

lack of experience with the deficit of “proper weapons, such as grenades and explosives” and then put the groups of partisans into unfamiliar territory where most “knew little about local conditions and did not even had maps and compasses” and it is easy to see why the Soviet partisan in 1941 could do little else then try to survive.³⁵⁸

Multiple Central Committee directives instructed Soviet partisans to “destroy crops, livestock, machinery, communications lines, public buildings and even private houses and barns” that may be used by the German forces.³⁵⁹ This “scorched earth” policy, executed by partisan bands, was harshest where the partisan political leadership was the most ideologically tied to Moscow and where the partisans had little connection with the locals.³⁶⁰ This drove the population away from partisan bands; but without options the population was stuck between German cruelty and Soviet repression.

The partisan fighter of 1941 faced enormous challenges, for which he and the Soviet Union were unprepared. Any independence of action by individual partisan commanders—which was officially encouraged at least once in July 1941—was quickly subordinated by multiple bureaucratic organizations.³⁶¹ The Red Army created the Tenth Department to “organize and direct the partisan units,” which caused considerable tactical mismanagement of the partisans.³⁶² The Red Army preferred to use to partisans as adjuncts to the operations on the front, directing attacks against German strong points and occasionally along the front itself, instead of against the softer communication and supply lines extended across the occupied territories.³⁶³

When Soviet partisan bands did try to conduct sabotage and raids against more appropriate targets, they were hampered by their “distinct amateurism” and “also limited by inexperience, poor or nonexistent training, and a devil-may-care attitude that

³⁵⁸ Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas*, 31.

³⁵⁹ Shepherd and Pattinson, *War in a Twilight World*, 41.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

³⁶¹ Slepyan, “The People’s Avengers,” 52.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 52–54.

occasionally brought them success but more frequently led to pointless losses.”³⁶⁴ When the partisans struck at the German occupying force, they were largely ineffective, and in some cases striking at the Germans invited their own destruction. In four months, from September 1941 to January 1942 the number of Soviet partisans dropped from 87,000 to 30,000 due in large part to effective German sweeps.³⁶⁵

By October 1941 the German 121st Infantry Division reported that insurgent activity near the town of Pavlovsk had dropped considerably because the partisans were no longer targeting the Wehrmacht, but rather “collaborators among the civilian population.”³⁶⁶ Historian Jeff Rutherford suggests that partisan reprisals aimed at collaborators and avoiding the German forces demonstrate the clear lack of support by the population for the Soviet partisan late in 1941 as well as the effectiveness of German anti-partisan tactics.³⁶⁷

The effectiveness of Soviet partisans that winter is summed up by historian Kenneth Slepyan with the statement that “[t]he partisans of 1941 caused relatively little damage to the enemy.”³⁶⁸ The winter of 1941 was clearly the low point for the Soviet partisans. To illustrate how dangerous it was, historian V. I. Boiarskii claims partisan groups around Leningrad dropped from 287 to 60, with an individual survival rate of 17 percent during the winter of 1941–1942.³⁶⁹

This misuse of the partisans by the Red Army was compounded by the fact that the partisans had multiple Soviet organs vying for control over them. The NKVD, the Party itself, and the Red Army “all established independent command structures” over the irregular force, each claiming primacy of jurisdiction.³⁷⁰ These competing interests

³⁶⁴ Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas*, 93–96.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁶⁶ Shepherd and Pattinson, *War in a Twilight World*, 69.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas*, 33.

³⁶⁹ V. I. Boiarskii, *Partizani I armii – Istoriia uteriannikh vozmozhnostei*, (Minsk: Kharvest, 2003), 16–26, as quoted in *Ibid.*, 31–32.

³⁷⁰ Slepyan, “The People’s Avengers,” 57.

would plague the partisans throughout the war, making them less effective than they could have otherwise been.

D. PARTISANS EXPAND AND EQUIP

As the Red Army ground away at the German forces, whose lines were extended through vast, occupied territory, Soviet leadership strove to centralize the partisan efforts. Increased supplies, coordination, and external support (in addition to the changing perception that Germany was invincible) began the shift from ineptitude to effectiveness. The partisans, however, were never able to fully realize their potential because of the draconian control Stalin placed on them.

The spring of 1942 brought a glimmer of hope to the occupied Soviet territories. The Red Army previously stopped the Nazis from taking Moscow and that spring began a counter-offensive. The partisan survivors of 1941 began to receive meaningful support from the Red Army by ground and sometimes by air, as well as officers and specialized detachments to provide training in “guerrilla warfare, sabotage, and subterfuge, coordinate them, and enlarge them with local recruits either willingly or press-ganged.”³⁷¹ The reduction in German troops to guard the rear area and conduct regular anti-partisan operations (due to their being sent forward to blunt the Soviet counter-offensive) gave most partisan bands the breathing room needed to reorganize and focus on the civilian population’s allegiance to the Soviet Party.³⁷²

However, German anti-partisan operations were still able to disrupt partisan bands whenever they became too troublesome. This was especially true each winter when the swamps froze and partisans were trackable and German anti-partisan operations forced partisans to over-winter in a safe area behind the Soviet lines. In some cases, winter saw a near 50 percent reduction in partisans in a given area despite strict orders not to voluntarily withdraw.³⁷³

³⁷¹ Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisan*, 110.

³⁷² Shepherd and Pattinson, *War in a Twilight World*, 42–43.

³⁷³ Hill, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941–45*, 211.

The same paranoia which caused Stalin to dismantle partisan preparation in the inter-war years caused him to desperately want to keep central control over the partisan elements. This manifested itself in the creation of the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement at the end of May 1942, headed by a close favorite of Stalin, Panteleymon Ponomarenko.³⁷⁴ Ponomarenko created multiple subordinate partisan headquarters which were to support the appropriate Red Army units formally (as opposed to the informal coordination which had occurred until this point).³⁷⁵

Central control was ideal for Stalin. He kept it by appointing politically-reliable leaders, sending inspectors, issuing orders in person by recalling field leaders to Moscow, dictating the army-to-partisan operations, as well as being able to earmark disloyal partisan bands for destruction.³⁷⁶ This level of control flew in the face of a “decentralized organization” as “a necessary feature of all guerrilla warfare.”³⁷⁷

E. SOVIET PARTISANS NEVER REACHED THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

All of this central control limited the partisans’ effectiveness and capped their potential. The newly formed Central Staff of the Partisan Movement also provided centralized oversight of the interaction with and propaganda espoused to the local population by the partisan units.³⁷⁸ This had the effect, as Alexander Hill points out, of distancing “decision making from the Fronts” and hampering “the ability of the movement to respond to the needs of the Red Army” in a timely and effective way.³⁷⁹

More to the point, “the Soviet regime had placed its faith in a strongly centralized, rather than decentralized, system of command. Instead of appreciating the advantages of decentralization to a guerrilla organization—independence, flexibility, and simplicity—

³⁷⁴ Matthew Cooper, *The Nazi War against Soviet Partisans, 1941–1944* (New York, NY: Stein and Day, 1979), 30.

³⁷⁵ Hill, *The War Behind the Eastern Front*, 121.

³⁷⁶ Slepian, *Stalin’s Guerrillas*, 114.

³⁷⁷ Armstrong, *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, 73.

³⁷⁸ Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisan*, 111.

³⁷⁹ Hill, *The War Behind the Eastern Front*, 122.

the Soviets feared its disadvantages—rebellion, stagnation, and disintegration,”³⁸⁰ precisely the lessons Stalin learned from the revolution. While these changes in the partisan leadership and hierarchy ensured Soviet loyalty, increased supply to the partisans, and coordinated partisan operations in support of the Red Army, it did at the cost of the overall effectiveness of the partisan operations and the hold they had over the civilian population. The level of control placed on the various partisan elements prevented their operations from achieving success on par with the guerrilla operations studied by Red Army academies, namely those of 1812 or of the Civil War.³⁸¹

The propaganda value of German reprisals against the population was such that, on occasion, partisans “deliberately provoke[d] vicious German reprisals against the population.”³⁸² One partisan leader requested a Communist film crew to record, for the propaganda value, the German atrocities.³⁸³ The Soviets knew what Otto Heilbrunn later pointed out in *Partisan Warfare*, that “disgust at the treatment meted out by the enemy...will win [the partisan] support even from those of their countrymen who have not hitherto regarded them with affection.”³⁸⁴ As a peasant leader remarked in 1943, “[w]e live between the hammer and the anvil.”³⁸⁵ They certainly did.

They knew it, but the Soviet centralized control failed local partisan leadership by not allowing the flexibility and operational control necessary to capitalize on the diverse local situations. A heavily centralized partisan movement equated to fewer battlefield effects. As historian Alexander Hill points out, “the casualties inflicted by partisans on German and allied forces did not actually damage German front-line operations through depriving them of troops committed permanently to security duties, or indeed draw

³⁸⁰ Cooper, *The Nazi War against Soviet Partisans, 1941–1944*, 30.

³⁸¹ Armstrong, *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, 75.

³⁸² Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisan*, 113.

³⁸³ Shepherd and Pattinson, *War in a Twilight World*, 46.

³⁸⁴ Otto. Heilbrunn, “Partisan Warfare” (Praeger, 1962), 147.

³⁸⁵ Shepherd and Pattinson, *War in a Twilight World*, 47.

substantial forces away from front-line duty for sustained periods of time, as was the Soviet intention.”³⁸⁶

For their part, the Germans were able to keep enough pressure on partisan bands through anti-partisan operations that partisan bands were largely unable to perform at the level Soviet historians later credited them with. One such German operation in the spring of 1943 claimed to have killed 424 partisans (of an estimated 2,455 active in that area) at a loss of only 11 Germans killed and 45 wounded in action.³⁸⁷ The Germans continued to conduct large-scale anti-partisan operations, conducting 19 from December 1943 to July 1944.³⁸⁸ Nevertheless, as 1943 wore on and Germany continued to lose territory to the Red Army, partisan operations increased.

1. A Valuable Supplemental Effect

For all of the drawbacks of a tightly controlled and highly centralized organizational structure—lack of freedom of action, disallowed tactical withdrawal, inflexibility of operational planning—the Red Army did benefit from the partisans’ disruptive attacks prior to major operations. In fact, the level of coordination enjoyed between the partisans and the Red Army was such that significant increases in partisan attacks “usually indicated that the enemy intended to launch an attack against the German lines.”³⁸⁹

Continued combat along the Eastern front drew German security forces away from anti-partisan and guard operations in the occupied Russian territory.³⁹⁰ At the same time, partisan operations reached their most effective levels of the war largely due to the favorable “numerical balance between partisan and security force strength.”³⁹¹ The summer of 1943, through the German withdrawal, saw the partisan bands operating more

³⁸⁶ Hill, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941–45*, 209.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 205–6.

³⁸⁸ Slepyan, *Stalin’s Guerrillas*, 90.

³⁸⁹ Bob Carruthers, ed., *German Anti-Partisan Combat* (Croyden, UK: Pen & Sword Military, 2013), 147, <http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/German-Anti-Partisan-Combat-Paperback/p/3886>.

³⁹⁰ Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisan*, 221.

³⁹¹ Hill, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941–45*, 209.

or less freely and largely in concert with the operations of the Red Army. That summer, Ponomarenko dictated that partisans “conduct systematic and simultaneous destruction of rails on enemy railways lines” in coordination with the Red Army’s offensive.³⁹²

The result of the so-called “war of the rails” was a significant disruption of German rail and communication networks in the occupied area. The Chief of Transportation for the German Army Group Center reported that “partisan activity increased by 25 percent during August 1943...the daily average amounted to 45 demolitions” along the rail lines.³⁹³ When this level of effective partisan activity emerged, it was under incredibly favorable conditions. However, even as coordinated attacks increased in the German rear, they never amounted to more than “a valuable supplement to the Soviet Army.”³⁹⁴ Although necessary and significant to the reduction in supplies received at the front by the German army, the partisan attacks never achieved the *coup de grâce* achieved by earlier Imperial Russian partisans.

By way of comparison, John Plaster claims that at the high point during America’s involvement in Vietnam, one U.S. Soldier operating behind enemy lines was able to tie “down six hundred NVA defenders, or about one NVA battalion per SOG recon man.”³⁹⁵ In stark contrast, the Soviet partisans enjoyed a 2-to-1 numerical superiority by the summer of 1943 but were only able to inflict tertiary damage to the Wehrmacht.³⁹⁶

With a larger force, increased freedom of action, and coordination with the Red Army it is an even stronger critique of the overall effectiveness of the partisans that the “increased partisan activity does not seem to have had a noticeable impact on Soviet losses at the front line.”³⁹⁷ Then, when one considers that nearly 40 percent of the Soviet

³⁹² Ibid., 212.

³⁹³ *Rear Area Security in Russia*, 26.

³⁹⁴ Simpson, “The German Experience of Rear Area Security on the Eastern Front 1941–45,” 44.

³⁹⁵ John L. Plaster, *SOG: The Secret Wars of America’s Commandos in Vietnam* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 355.

³⁹⁶ Simpson, “The German Experience of Rear Area Security on the Eastern Front 1941–45,” 44.

³⁹⁷ Hill, *The War Behind the Eastern Front*, 172.

population lived under German occupation during this time,³⁹⁸ it is remarkable that the partisans were not more disruptive to the German occupation and front-line forces.

2. Latent Potential Remained Untapped

Both Germany and Soviet Russia failed to capitalize on opportunities on the Eastern Front and in the occupied areas. The German counterinsurgency program failed as they placed most of their resources behind the conventional military front, harsh anti-partisan reprisals and ideological Nazi *pogroms*, rather than engagement with the population. The Soviets failed to form an effective guerrilla force for quite some time, in the end controlling the partisan units and their leaders at the cost of tactical flexibility.

Stalin's orders to dismantle prepositioned stocks of military equipment was a critical limiting factor in the initial Soviet reaction to Operation Barbarossa. The stocks could have increased partisan effectiveness early on and therefore perhaps softened the blow of the German army during and shortly after Operation Barbarossa.

Even had the Soviets prepared for war in occupied territories, partisan operations still would have been restricted by the tight political control sought by Stalin. This centralized and byzantine control was compounded by the overlapping command structures of the NKVD, the Party, and the Red Army in a "parallelism that debilitated the partisan movement throughout the war."³⁹⁹ The Soviets opted for absolute control over the partisan bands and leadership which undoubtedly cost them time and lives. More resources could have been diverted by a more effective irregular campaign, bleeding the German forces in occupied territory. As late as spring 1943, Ponomarenko admitted to Stalin that partisan operations had not yet "reached such an extent as to have operations impact on the German front line."⁴⁰⁰ Coming from Stalin's hand-picked man, that acknowledgement is stunning. Partisan operations could be summed up by the Soviet penchant for loyal party leadership over effective military operations.

³⁹⁸ Russell W. Glenn, "Soviet Partisan Warfare: Integral to the Whole," (School of Advanced Military Studies, 1988), 18.

³⁹⁹ Slepian, "The People's Avengers," 57.

⁴⁰⁰ Hill, *The War Behind the Eastern Front*, 132–33.

Even when centralized and coordinated attacks were made, the partisans' attacks were against rear guard and security forces or collaborators and local government officials rather than front-line troops—at best an indirect help to the war effort. This misuse of partisans' irregular capabilities stems from the officer corps not understanding the role partisans should play as well as the “inability of Red Army officers to assign sound targets and advise on appropriate tactics...for conducting a partisan struggle.”⁴⁰¹

The partisans' operations later in the war were supporting efforts to the Red Army's objectives as opposed to utilizing their unique abilities and leveraging those to complement the Red Army's objectives. Even when partisans were able to achieve significant disruption of the German rail and supply system in the summer of 1943, they were unable to overwhelm German communications or supply systems. Nor were the partisans able to prevent the Wehrmacht from operating effectively at the front or diverting significant, additional resources to the lines of communication.

The organized, determined, and ruthless German opponent was one reason the Soviet partisan was unable to contribute more than they did. The other reason was Stalin's need for control. The end result is the Soviet partisans missed more opportunities than they took advantage of. The effort to centralize operations made responsiveness and flexibility nearly impossible. Consolidation of partisan elements into larger groups proved to be easy targets for German sweeps. The impact by the Soviets, “remained limited in comparison to the very large numbers of men involved.”⁴⁰² The smaller bands of partisans conducting reconnaissance and raids in conjunction with specialized Red Army units showed much more promise early in the war but were abandoned because of the Soviet political leadership's desire for control.

As is clearly demonstrated by Russia's conquest of Crimea and the Moscow-backed separatist in eastern Ukraine, Moscow's desire for control over irregulars has not waned over time. When Russian-backed separatists fired a BUK anti-aircraft missile, shooting down Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, Russia's hand in the growing crisis, as

⁴⁰¹ Slepian, “The People's Avengers,” 56–57.

⁴⁰² Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia*, 124.

well as its control over the separatists, was fully reviled.⁴⁰³ More to the point, after the incident, Igor Girkin (the former Russian intelligence officer turned separatists leader who was in charge of the downing of flight MH17) was recalled to Moscow over the incident.⁴⁰⁴ If the experience from the Great Patriotic War is still pertinent, as long as Russian irregular warfare is pursued from the kremlin, the mechanisms for control over it will not be far behind.

⁴⁰³ Glenn Kates, "Flight MH17 Fact Sheet: Evidence Increasingly Points To Moscow," *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, July 21, 2014, sec. Ukrain, <http://www.rferl.org/a/factsheet-mh17-russia/25464815.html>.

⁴⁰⁴ Daniel Baer, "Russia's Ongoing Violations in Ukraine: Statement to the PC" (U.S. Mission OSCE, February 11, 2016), <https://osce.usmission.gov/russias-ongoing-violations-in-ukraine-6/>.

VI. SOVIETS AS COUNTERINSURGENTS

The Soviets took to the Afghan battlefield as a “modern, mechanized army [and] tried to defeat a guerrilla force on rugged terrain in the middle of a civil war. Despite their best efforts, they were unable to achieve decisive military victory and their politicians finally ordered them home. Other armies would do well to study their efforts.”⁴⁰⁵

A. INCREMENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan began late in 1979 with what can be seen in retrospect as a warning to nations getting involved in the business of providing military aid and expertise abroad. After Afghanistan refused to join an anti-Communist alliance with the United States, an Afghan request for military aid was turned down, leaving an opening for the Soviet Union to expand from economic to military aid.⁴⁰⁶ This exchange led to the Soviets, “who had no intention at first of entering into a full-scale conflict,” into an ever more involved presence in Afghanistan, and eventually all-out war to protect the investments made and stability of their southern border.⁴⁰⁷ After two coups in the 1970s, the Soviet Union installed the first Communist leader, Nur Mohammed Taraki.⁴⁰⁸

As the new Communist Afghan government developed and implemented policies which ran counter to traditional Islamist customs, Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev found the Soviet Union being drawn into Afghan domestic turmoil. The Taraki government disregarded “the national social structure and mores, [and therefore] the new government enjoyed little popular support.”⁴⁰⁹ The reforms and policies implemented were

⁴⁰⁵ Lester W. Grau, ed., *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan*, 10th anniversary edition (Fort Leavenworth, KS: National Defense University Press Publications, 2010).

⁴⁰⁶ Joshua L. Gleis, *Withdrawing under Fire: Lessons Learned from Islamist Insurgencies*, 1st ed. (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2011), 40.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴⁰⁹ Ali Ahmad. Jalali and Lester W. Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War* (Quantico, VA: U.S. Marine Corps, Studies and Analysis Division, 1999), <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS72248>.

inflammatory and “the reaction of the rural people and devout Muslims, coupled with the inefficiencies of the local bureaucracy, triggered a spontaneous and anarchic rural insurgency.”⁴¹⁰ As the Communist government lashed out “with mass arrests and executions” in an attempt to gain control, the Afghan army “began to melt away, soldiers deserting by the thousands, taking their weapons with them.”⁴¹¹

As violence across the country ramped up, so did Soviet military support. In one instance, an entire Afghan division mutinied, killing “one hundred Soviet advisers and their families” and parading their heads on pikes.⁴¹² The Soviets increased military aid and began flying combat missions supporting loyal Afghan units, but the Afghan government continued to disintegrate.⁴¹³ Once the government lost control of two-thirds of Afghanistan, and Soviet citizens were killed by mob violence, the Brezhnev Doctrine could not abide the black eye that would come from a lost Communist government in Afghanistan.⁴¹⁴ In an eerie parallel to the United States’ incremental intervention in Vietnam, the Politburo’s leadership made the decision to increase involvement from military equipment and advisors to full-scale deployment of troops, initially tasked with “pacifying and controlling Afghanistan.”⁴¹⁵

1. From *Coup de Main* to Counter-Guerrilla

As the Soviet Union found itself forced to execute a “military rescue of a beleaguered fellow regime,” it was faced with an unreliable partner whose military had been cut in half by desertion.⁴¹⁶ The other half of the Afghan military, including entire units with their equipment, formed the center of resistance to the Afghan government and

⁴¹⁰ Olivier Roy, *The Lessons of the Soviet/Afghan War*, Adelphi Papers (London, UK: Brassey’s for The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1991), 12.

⁴¹¹ Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 2002), 231.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 232.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁴¹⁴ Gleis, *Withdrawing under Fire*, 43.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴¹⁶ Tanner, *Afghanistan*, 233, 235.

its Soviet backers. This resistance was “chiefly conventional” at first.⁴¹⁷ The Soviets were unconcerned by the threat posed by radical Islamist elements, or any other elements relegated to the “remote mountain regions.”⁴¹⁸ Nor did they need to be, at least at first.

One reason for the smooth beginning to the Afghan campaign was the thoroughness of involvement by the Soviets in the Afghan military. For a year prior to the invasion, a Soviet Spetsnaz battalion was providing personal security for the president.⁴¹⁹ These Soviet Special Forces were from Central Asia and “dressed in Afghan Army uniforms and helped secure the official residence.”⁴²⁰ They were not the only Soviet troops in disguise in Afghanistan. The Soviet military had a squadron of pilots, also from Central Asia, who flew planes with Afghan tail numbers and wore Afghan uniforms prior to the invasion.⁴²¹

Another reason for such a smooth deployment of troops was the deception operations employed by the Soviet advisors paired with conventional Afghan Army units. Dealing with the unpredictable loyalty of their Afghan counterparts and fearing that their weapons would be used to ‘welcome’ the deploying Soviet troops (a concern that would never go away and one that American forces would deal with later), Soviet advisors came up with clever ways to neutralize entire units during the initial invasion. In one instance, Soviet advisors informed two divisions of Afghan armor that their vehicles were to be upgraded and to prepare for that their existing combat vehicles had to be drained of fuel.⁴²² In another instance, “Soviet advisers requested an inventory of faulty ammunition, which meant unloading tanks of their shells; in another, two hundred

⁴¹⁷ Gleis, *Withdrawing under Fire*, 44.

⁴¹⁸ Roy, *The Lessons of the Soviet/Afghan War*, 14, 16.

⁴¹⁹ The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, ed. Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress, Modern War Studies (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Joseph Collins, “The Soviet-Afghan War: The First Four Years,” *Parameters* 14, no. 2 (1984): 51.

⁴²² Tanner, *Afghanistan*, 235.

vehicles were immobilized by ordering their batteries to be removed for ‘winterization.’”⁴²³

The initial invasion included a putsch to put a more pliable Afghan leader in power, as well as the goal of securing the major cities in an effort to pacify the country and thereby give their puppet government room to consolidate control.⁴²⁴ The invasion plan “was straightforward and designed along conventional lines.”⁴²⁵ Soviet planners estimated that troops would be required for several months, and assumed intervention in Afghanistan would play out similarly to other interventions within the Soviet sphere such as Czechoslovakia.⁴²⁶ Executed on Christmas Eve 1979, the “invasion was masterfully planned and well executed.”⁴²⁷ Spetsnaz forces assassinated Afghan president Hafizullah Amin while conventional forces poured in by airlift and ground convoy.⁴²⁸ The Soviet forces did encounter some resistance, but those conventional resistance forces were swiftly dealt with by the Red Army and within a week all of the major cities were under Soviet military control.⁴²⁹

Having gained their immediate objectives, the Soviets consolidated around “major cities, communications hubs, and transportation arteries throughout the country.”⁴³⁰ They could now provide the security for the new Afghan government to establish a political base and “assume responsibility for the war.”⁴³¹ That the invasion itself inadvertently “linked Islamic insurgency to the cause of national liberation” in Afghanistan only became evident later.⁴³² The hostile population in Afghanistan viewed Soviet intervention as “committed to the destruction of Islam,” providing a powerful impetus to

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Roy, *The Lessons of the Soviet/Afghan War*, 17.

⁴²⁵ Tanner, *Afghanistan*, 237.

⁴²⁶ Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain*, xix.

⁴²⁷ The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War*, xxiii.

⁴²⁸ Gleis, *Withdrawing under Fire*, 45.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Roy, *The Lessons of the Soviet/Afghan War*, 17.

⁴³² Ibid.

the insurgency.⁴³³ Likewise, the population could not remove the specter of “the suppression of Central Asian and other Muslim neighbors by the Tsarist and later Soviet forces.”⁴³⁴ These causes invigorated the Muslim world and “more and more Muslims from outside the country arrived to join what had by then been termed a jihad against the Soviets.”⁴³⁵

In addition to the overlooked threat building in the countryside, Soviet military planners forgot the lessons learned by the British in Afghanistan during the Great Game. Both the First and Second Anglo-Afghan wars ended with British designs for Afghanistan blunted and her forces beaten and forced to withdraw.⁴³⁶ The Red Army would learn firsthand what had been taught to each invader by the disparate tribes in Afghanistan: “the collapse of the central government of Afghanistan or the destruction of its standing armies has never resulted in the defeat of the nation by an invader. The people, relying on their decentralized political, economic and military potential, have always taken over the resistance against the invaders.”⁴³⁷ The Soviets faced a growing insurgency, amid a civil war, and were not prepared for it.

2. From War of Movement to Guerrilla Fighters

The initial combat seen by the Soviets was force-on-force, and it did not take long before the Mujahedeen forces which “did not back off from direct contact” were destroyed by the Soviets.⁴³⁸ What remained of the resistance were “hundreds of small bands” which were part of the popular Afghan discontent with the Soviet invasion.⁴³⁹

⁴³³ Alam Payind, “Soviet-Afghan Relations from Cooperation to Occupation,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21, no. 1 (1989): 108.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Gleis, *Withdrawing under Fire*, 44.

⁴³⁶ Hy S. Rothstein and John Arquilla, eds., *Afghan Endgames: Strategy and Policy Choices for America's Longest War*, South Asia in World Affairs Series (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), 48–51.

⁴³⁷ Ali A. Jalali, “Clashes of Ideas and Interests in Afghanistan,” paper given at the Institute of World Politics, Washington, DC, July 1995, page 4, as quoted in Jalali and Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain*., xiv.

⁴³⁸ The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War*, 19.

⁴³⁹ Lester W. Grau, “The Soviet-Afghan War: A Superpower Mired in the Mountains,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 17, no. 1 (2004): 134.

These initial guerrilla elements were local Afghans protecting their homes, part of a secular revolt against the Red Army, and with their base of support derived from their own neighbors and relatives.⁴⁴⁰

These guerrilla elements were lightly armed, initially with antiquated bolt-action rifles, supplemented by captured government weapons wherever possible.⁴⁴¹ The Mujahideen were unpaid and had volunteered as warriors against the Soviets, making the spoils of war particularly important.⁴⁴² After the local commander had taken his share of the bounty from a successful raid or ambush, the fighters would sell excess weapons on the black market, where an AK47 could fetch an impressive \$2,800.⁴⁴³

As foreign countries were looking to support the mujahideen against the Soviets, two avenues became apparent, Pakistan or Iran. Pakistan supported seven loose factions to which the Pakistan intelligence service funneled foreign aid.⁴⁴⁴ Iran controlled four.⁴⁴⁵ Pakistani intelligence preferred the more radical Islamic groups, giving them the most support.⁴⁴⁶ The foreign aid, and the fundamentalist groups rewarded with it, soon undercut “the traditional authority of the tribal and village chiefs” and put it squarely in the hands of radical Afghan clerics.⁴⁴⁷

The Mujahideen employed classic guerrilla tactics of striking only when the circumstances were favorable and disappearing into the population or rough terrain when they were not. Mujahideen groups targeted “Soviet rear guards as well as the Soviets’ smaller isolated units, their communications, and the less-trained Afghan forces.”⁴⁴⁸ As these groups became better organized and standardized—to the limited extent they

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War*, 58.

⁴⁴² Grau, “The Soviet-Afghan War,” 138.

⁴⁴³ Collins, “The Soviet-Afghan War: The First Four Years,” 51.

⁴⁴⁴ Grau, “The Soviet-Afghan War,” 136–138.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 136–38.

⁴⁴⁶ Gleis, *Withdrawing under Fire*, 47.

⁴⁴⁷ Grau, “The Soviet-Afghan War,” 136.

⁴⁴⁸ Gleis, *Withdrawing under Fire*, 46.

were—they general consisted of a dozen to 50 men, broken down into various subgroups by weapon or task.⁴⁴⁹ These would be varied according to the area they were in and the tactical mission they embarked upon, including attacks against lines of communication, mining roads, attacking local forces or garrison with the intent to terrorize, or linking up with other groups for larger combat operations.⁴⁵⁰

The eventual introduction of anti-aircraft and anti-armor weapons such as the *Stinger* missile and *Milan* rocket, as well as increased logistical support in the form of mules and vehicles, gave the Mujahedeen a much-needed boost in capability.⁴⁵¹ However, the increase in supply meant that the mujahideen had to establish “a series of supply depots, supply points and forward supply points inside Afghanistan to ease their logistics dilemma.”⁴⁵² These became easy targets for larger Soviet raids and sweeps.⁴⁵³

Even so, Mujahedeen fighters were still able to bring the fight to the Soviets, on their terms and at times of their choosing. Some of the best-trained fighters would attack in urban settings—with bombings, kidnapping, torture, and raids—in a deliberate attempt to strike fear into Afghan government and Soviet officials.⁴⁵⁴

Though they were being well supplied, were veterans in guerrilla warfare and had, by some estimates, control over 90 percent of the countryside,⁴⁵⁵ the Mujahedeen bands remained tied to their communities and possessed no strategy beyond driving the Soviets from Afghanistan.⁴⁵⁶ The Mujahedeen were unable to coordinate between their groups in a meaningful way outside of immediate tactical support.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁴⁹ The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War*, 58–59.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁵¹ Roy, *The Lessons of the Soviet/Afghan War*, 54.

⁴⁵² Grau, “The Soviet-Afghan War,” 140.

⁴⁵³ Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain*, 57–66.

⁴⁵⁴ Gleis, *Withdrawing under Fire*, 47.

⁴⁵⁵ Collins, “The Soviet-Afghan War: The First Four Years,” 51.

⁴⁵⁶ Roy, *The Lessons of the Soviet/Afghan War*, 54.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

The most powerful weapon the Mujahedeen possessed was the ideology and drive to continue to fight no matter the cost. If General Theodore Mataxis is correct, that “guerrillas do not need [a] military victory. Guerrillas need to survive and endure” to outlast the will of their opponent, then the Soviet invasion and counter-guerrilla operations were fighting an uphill battle from the beginning. Robert Kaplan captured the Afghani sentiment when an old Afghan man said “[m]y God gives me strength. My God always helps me...After we drive the *shuravi* [Soviet forces] out of Afghanistan, we will drive them out of Bukhara and Samarkand and Tashkent too. *Allahu akbar!*”⁴⁵⁸

B. RE-LEARNING LESSONS

It took the Soviet General Staff years to compile a detailed analysis of the Soviet-Afghan war. In fact, by the time it occurred it was done under the Russian General Staff, no longer “Soviet.” Once complete, one of the most critical passages about the Red Army’s (lack of) preparation for intervention in Afghanistan was about the historical lessons seemingly forgotten or discarded. As the General Staff wrote, “[t]he massive experience that Soviet forces gained in their fight with the Basmachi movement was simply forgotten. The more recent experiences of Fascist Germany during the Second World War and the experience of other armies that conducted counter-guerrilla actions in local wars were practically ignored.”⁴⁵⁹ This organizational amnesia left the Red Army having to re-learn through trial and error how to conduct anti-guerrilla operations effectively.

But there were other things that were not forgotten, such as the ability to wage *guerre à outrance*. One of the first things the Soviets did was to attempt to remove the base of support from the Mujahedeen through what Louis Dupree termed “migratory genocide.”⁴⁶⁰ The Soviet air force deliberately targeted the rural social system, the “irrigation systems, orchards, cropland, farms, villages and livestock,” which limited the

⁴⁵⁸ Robert D. Kaplan, *Soldiers of God : With Islamic Warriors in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, 1st Vintage Departures ed. (New York, NY: Vintage Departures, 2001), 114.

⁴⁵⁹ The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War*, 19.

⁴⁶⁰ Thomas Taylor Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan : The Communist Coup, the Soviet Invasion, and the Consequences* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 161.

guerrillas' support networks.⁴⁶¹ Soviet forces destroyed entire villages and regularly burned crops to “force the population—the main source of logistical support [for the insurgent]—to flee to Pakistan or Iran.”⁴⁶² The Soviet forces would conduct reprisal attacks against villages suspected of supporting the mujahideen, with the sole purpose of “exterminating the local population.”⁴⁶³ They destroyed infrastructure as well as imposed conscription creating a massive refugee and internal displacement problem where seven million people fled their homes.⁴⁶⁴ This “scorched earth” attempt at counterinsurgency was actually one of the few lessons from Imperial Russia the Soviets had not forgotten.⁴⁶⁵

Several significant lessons re-learned were identified and published by Douglas Hart in 1982. The two most important Hart identified were the need to give operational and tactical unit commanders the ability to decentralize command and control and the need to adapt units specifically for operations based on local combat conditions. Hart quoted Soviet Colonel Ryzhkov making the case for decentralized decision making, saying “emphasis on independent action...[with] a certain degree of decentralization of troop command and control” is needed and must be complimented by commanders who “display greater initiative.”⁴⁶⁶

The Soviet forces had to re-learn the importance of organizing a force in an appropriate way for the mission at hand. The Soviet units that initially deployed to Afghanistan had all of their standard equipment and units attached as if they were going to war in the European theater, including units unnecessary and unsuitable for conflict in Afghanistan.⁴⁶⁷ As the war continued, forces adapted to the circumstances they faced.

⁴⁶¹ Grau, “The Soviet-Afghan War,” 135.

⁴⁶² Collins, “The Soviet-Afghan War: The First Four Years,” 51.

⁴⁶³ Emily. Spencer, *The Difficult War: Perspectives on Insurgency and Special Operations Forces* (Kingston, CAN: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2009), 154.

⁴⁶⁴ Jalali and Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain*, xix.

⁴⁶⁵ Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 142.

⁴⁶⁶ Douglas M. Hart, “Low-Intensity Conflict in Afghanistan: The Soviet View,” *Survival* 24, no. 2 (1982): 65.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

Soviet forces came to “rely on the nimble actions of small subunits of the various combat arms” where the Soviet commander had reconfigured “combat units for specific missions.”⁴⁶⁸

Several examples of Soviet commanders bringing together a makeshift combined arms battalion for a “spur of the moment” operation are illustrated as vignettes in *The Bear Went Over The Mountain*, translated by Lester Grau.⁴⁶⁹ In one example, the Soviet commander illustrates how he combined local Afghan security forces with mounted infantry forces and airborne reconnaissance to locate, block, and then destroy a guerrilla force. The commentator credits the Soviet commander with “decisive, unconventional action, a good knowledge of the terrain, and the correct organization” in achieving victory.⁴⁷⁰

Another re-learned phenomenon was the need to protect against mountain ambushes. One of the techniques used in Central Asia, adapted from the earlier campaigns in the Caucasus, was to ensure logistics convoys were flanked by security. The Soviets eventually “tailored a march formation to provide security against ambush” pushing “a reconnaissance patrol...in advance of the main force and was followed by a security element.”⁴⁷¹ As techniques became more refined, the convoy would contain “a company of assault troops equipped with bullet-proof vests, large and small machine guns, and grenades,” presumably to counterattack an ambush with considerable firepower.⁴⁷²

The increased flexibility enjoyed by Soviet commanders was complemented by significant improvements in and adaptations to equipment. The Soviets adapted the use of armored vehicles, without infantry, as an independent element on the battlefield called

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 65.

⁴⁶⁹ Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain*, 90–94, 119–124.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 123.

⁴⁷¹ Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 159.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 164.

the *bronegrupp*a (armored group).⁴⁷³ To support this adaptation, they replaced the 73mm cannon with an automatic 30mm gun to “achieve an even larger volume of suppressive fire.”⁴⁷⁴ They employed rough terrain and mountain climbing training for certain units headed to Afghanistan, as well as specialized mountaineering equipment.⁴⁷⁵

The much-mentioned use of airpower and airlift by the Soviets came hand-in-glove with smaller, specialized units taking tactical primacy while “the role of conventional infantry” was being “reduced largely to garrison duty.”⁴⁷⁶ Not only was the airlift required to support the Soviet forces in Afghanistan impressive in its own right, but the use of fixed-wing and helicopters, for logistics and fire support, “proved invaluable” to the Soviets in the rugged terrain.⁴⁷⁷

In Napoleonic times, Davydov flourished under a decentralized command architecture. Later in the 19th century, Skobelev encouraged independent action by his subordinate commanders in Central Asia. In the Great Patriotic War, though, commanders of partisan operations were less independent. But the concept of flexible, independent leadership once again gained importance in Afghanistan. One Soviet contemporary stated that “a certain degree of decentralization of troop command and control is a unique feature of ‘mountain combat operations,’” the *nom de guerre* for operations in Afghanistan.⁴⁷⁸ The importance of decentralization increased as the Soviet forces relied on “small operations by highly trained units.”⁴⁷⁹

These small units were normally airborne, air assault or Spetsnaz forces, as most of the major Soviet military formations were tied up providing garrison security to the

⁴⁷³ Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain*, xv.

⁴⁷⁴ Collins, “The Soviet-Afghan War: The First Four Years,” 52.

⁴⁷⁵ Hart, “Low-Intensity Conflict in Afghanistan,” 65.

⁴⁷⁶ Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 148.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁴⁷⁸ Hart, “Low-Intensity Conflict in Afghanistan,” 65.

⁴⁷⁹ Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 143.

major cities and infrastructure.⁴⁸⁰ This created a situation where company and battalion sized operations were the norm, and “lower level initiative [was] essential for survival and success.”⁴⁸¹ This was for the better, as far as Soviet forces were concerned, as the elite military units favored in this environment “generally proved to be better trained, more responsive to the dynamics of battle, and more capable of independent actions.”⁴⁸²

One type of specialized unit was the *obkhodiashchie otridayi* (infiltration detachment).⁴⁸³ These special operations units were developed to conduct raids behind the mujahideen lines at a time when most Soviet forces were stationary or only conducting large scale operations.⁴⁸⁴ These detachments could conduct a verity of disruptive operations, but typically operated in conjunction with a larger element which would serve as a sort of distraction while the infiltration detachment moved into place.⁴⁸⁵

It also created a situation more damaging to the overall Soviet intervention. If the Soviet goal was to produce security long enough for an Afghan government to take over the fighting, their emphasis on small unit sweeps and raids was not supporting it.⁴⁸⁶ Their operations were not well coordinated with Afghan “territorial units, police forces, and local militias” which in turn did not “provide the necessary security solutions required.”⁴⁸⁷

Instead the Soviet forces, although becoming flexible and more attuned to their operating environment, would conduct raids or sweeps and leave little to no presence behind after the operation. As noted by historian Robert Baumann, the “Soviet command

⁴⁸⁰ Grau, “The Soviet-Afghan War,” 140.

⁴⁸¹ Grau, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain*, 102.

⁴⁸² Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 150.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁴⁸⁴ Ariel. Levite, Bruce W. Jentleson, and Larry Berman, eds., *Foreign Military Intervention: The Dynamics of Protracted Conflict* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1992), 84, Table of contents <http://www.gbv.de/dms/bowker/toc/9780231072953.pdf>.

⁴⁸⁵ Hart, “Low-Intensity Conflict in Afghanistan,” 65.

⁴⁸⁶ Olga Oliker, *Building Afghanistan’s Security Forces in Wartime: The Soviet Experience*, Rand Corporation Monograph Series. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2011), 19.

⁴⁸⁷ Spencer, *The Difficult War*, 156.

of an area lasted only so long as its forces remained in physical occupation of the ground. As soon as Soviet forces departed, control reverted to the resistance.”⁴⁸⁸ The Afghan Army and police force that the Soviets were attempting to train to take over security simply were not up to the security task, and rarely given the opportunity to lead.⁴⁸⁹ Such operations demonstrate what a February 1981 memo circulated among Politburo members meant when it said “no military solution to the war was possible.”⁴⁹⁰ Unfortunately the recommendation in that same memo to find a political or diplomatic solution to the Afghan conflict was not heeded.

Perhaps the most difficult task and largest failure of the Soviet-Afghan war was the failure to deny the mujahideen external support. Despite the Soviets training nearly 30,000 border forces and enabling a further 70,000 militia along the border regions, the border itself remained porous.⁴⁹¹ The mujahideen, therefore, retained a safe area and access to external support—two critical requirements for the insurgency. Even though the Soviets conducted hundreds of air and artillery strikes inside Pakistan, and employed major operations against supply depots inside Afghanistan, the Soviets were only able to interdict about one-third of the supplies the mujahideen were importing.⁴⁹²

One area the Soviets had great success in was the arena of intelligence and internal secret police. Tapping into the web of Soviet apparatuses, Afghans were trained abroad in a number of skills, depending on which department they were in, and then returned to Afghanistan and their units to conduct interrogations, identify insurgents, develop intelligence, protect key infrastructure or conduct reconnaissance.⁴⁹³ Some of these Ministry of Interior troops functioned as highly developed, well equipped special

⁴⁸⁸ Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 142.

⁴⁸⁹ Olikier, *Building Afghanistan’s Security Forces in Wartime: The Soviet Experience*, 40–41.

⁴⁹⁰ Artemy. Kalinovsky, “Decision-Making and the Soviet War in Afghanistan: From Intervention to Withdrawal,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11, no. 4 (2009): 58.

⁴⁹¹ Olikier, *Building Afghanistan’s Security Forces in Wartime: The Soviet Experience*, 51–57.

⁴⁹² Spencer, *The Difficult War*, 155.

⁴⁹³ Olikier, *Building Afghanistan’s Security Forces in Wartime: The Soviet Experience*, 28–30.

forces units, conducting raids and “small unit actions,” or independent operations to “identify and eliminate mujahideen.”⁴⁹⁴

Because these various forces were “generally respected by Soviet advisors and viewed as effective,” they enjoyed more success and support than other Afghan elements.⁴⁹⁵ The Soviets used these forces to deepen the already divided and segmented nature of Afghan society by using agents to “spread conflict and division among the various resistance groups.”⁴⁹⁶ Even though the Soviets were able to make small subversions and disruptions, the overall campaign of “pitting the various mujahideen bands against each other proved to be of limited value.”⁴⁹⁷ Neither the internal security forces nor the disruption they caused the mujahideen were enough to save the Soviet Union from defeat in Afghanistan.

While it is true that the Soviets made significant strides in training an Afghan security apparatus that would secure the Najibullah government after Soviet forces withdrew, the “many deals and alliances that were struck [with various insurgent groups] proved short-lived and fluid.”⁴⁹⁸ The deals, in addition to significant military hardware, including four R-300 “SCUD” missile battalions, showed the determination of the Soviets to stave off a Vietnam-like withdrawal.⁴⁹⁹ Olga Oliker gives the Soviets credit for creating forces that could protect the government while also criticizing the Soviet and Afghan governments for the failure to “build an effective state in Afghanistan.”⁵⁰⁰ When the Soviets carefully orchestrated General Boris Gromov walking the last of the Soviet

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 32–33.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁹⁶ Spencer, *The Difficult War*, 151.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 157.

⁴⁹⁸ Oliker, *Building Afghanistan's Security Forces in Wartime: The Soviet Experience*, 78.

⁴⁹⁹ The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War*, 158.

⁵⁰⁰ Oliker, *Building Afghanistan's Security Forces in Wartime: The Soviet Experience*, 79.

forces across the Friendship Bridge, they achieved what the United States was unable to do departing Vietnam: an orderly withdrawal.⁵⁰¹

However, neither the nine years of training, the military equipment transferred, the graduated withdrawal and transfer of the burden of combat, nor the alliances struck with warlords were enough to preserve the Najibullah government for more than a few years past the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.⁵⁰² Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Najibullah government was defunct; the man himself took refuge on a United Nations compound until the Taliban finally captured Kabul and executed him.⁵⁰³

C. FINAL ANALYSIS

Whether or not expelling the Soviets from Central Asia was ever the broader goal of the insurgents in Afghanistan in the 1980s, as the man interviewed by Robert Kaplan suggested, is debatable. That Russia currently believes radical Islamists in Afghanistan and Central Asia are a threat is not. Russia has spent billions of dollars and continues to deploy thousands of troops to help with border security to prevent the current Afghan threat from spreading further into Central Asia.⁵⁰⁴ Russia's current reaction to the radical jihadist problem in Afghanistan is, in part, learned from their Soviet experiences.

The Soviet Union had significant success in adjusting tactically to the peculiarities of war in Afghanistan. Although they had to re-discover some basic lessons of Russian irregular warfare, they were very successful at adapting to conditions as they found them. The Soviets tested and refined weapons, equipment, and operational procedures. They discarded the overly-tight centralized control of the Great Patriotic War

⁵⁰¹ "Soviet-Era Journalist, Face Of Afghan War, Looks Back On Pullout," *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, February 14, 2014, sec. Afghanistan, <http://www.rferl.org/a/soviet-invasion-afghanistan-/25264395.html>.

⁵⁰² The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War*, 304–5.

⁵⁰³ "Najibullah | President of Afghanistan | Britannica.com," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, October 21, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mohammad-Najibullah>, accessed November, 2016.

⁵⁰⁴ Reid Standish, "Putin to Central Asia: Let Daddy Save You From the Islamic State," *Foreign Policy*, June 11, 2015, Online edition, sec. Passport, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/11/russia-is-exploiting-fears-of-the-islamic-state-to-grow-its-military-influence-central-asia-isis/>.

in favor of decentralization at the tactical level—giving the ground force commanders the flexibility to succeed.

It is telling that as early as 1980 Soviet military leadership “concurred that there was no military solution to the unfolding situation in Afghanistan.”⁵⁰⁵ They were unsuccessful in establishing the security themselves, or the Afghan security forces needed to replace their own, to enable the Communist regime’s survival after the Soviet forces withdrew. Significantly, they were also unable to control access to the sanctuary mujahideen had in Pakistan.

Despite much blood and treasure, “the Soviets were never able to gain significant support from the population or to appreciably delegitimize the cause of the insurgents,” due in large part to “the fact that the Soviets could not make an impact in areas where they were unable to establish a permanent security presence.”⁵⁰⁶ After nine and a half years of conflict, the Soviets had better military tactics for fighting in Afghanistan but still had no military solution. Mikhail Gorbachev, after assessing the conflict, determined the Soviet Union would not pay the cost required to continue the war, and ordered an end to the conflict. When the last Soviet vehicles crossed the Friendship Bridge leaving Afghanistan, the Soviet legacy stood at over 1.3 million people killed and 7 million displaced by the conflict.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁵ Kalinovsky, “Decision-Making and the Soviet War in Afghanistan,” 56.

⁵⁰⁶ Spencer, *The Difficult War*, 153.

⁵⁰⁷ Jalali and Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain*, xviii.

VII. WAR IN THE CAUCASUS

The valleys are yours, the mountains are ours. It is you who are a prisoner here!

— Dialogue adapted from
Prisoner of the Mountains, 1996⁵⁰⁸

A. UNIQUE CHARACTER

The recent Chechen wars reflect a complex struggle of nationalism, independence, cultural identity, religious fervor, post-cold war politics, and a proud martial history. Making analysis more complicated, the proportionality and significance of the motivational factors constantly evolved as the conflicts played out. Any conflict in the Caucasus, especially the first and second Chechen wars, cannot be viewed only as another counterterrorism battleground, or simply a fight against the ascendance of religious fanaticism, or merely a series of nationalist violent outbreaks after the breakup of the Soviet Union. The most recent conflicts and the export of fighters from the Caucasus is a modern extension of a cultural heritage of irregular warfare that is centuries old.

1. The Social and Cultural Foundation

As the Russians expanded their empire into the North Caucasus, they encountered fiercely independent people. The people of Chechnya, as well as neighboring Ingushetia and Dagestan, are some of the most tribal and traditional.⁵⁰⁹ Indeed, these strong organizational and persistent cultural values of Chechen society (and the Caucasus in

⁵⁰⁸ Dialogue adapted from the movie *Prisoner of the Mountains*, which is, itself, adapted from Leo Tolstoy's short story "The Prisoner in the Caucasus." The movie has the roles reversed from the short story. Sergei Bodrov, Susanna Mekhralieva, Oleg Men'shikov, Djemal Sikharulidze, *Prisoner of the Mountains*, Russian ed., directed by Sergei Bodrov, (Los Angeles, CA: Orion Classics, 1996), Videocassette (VHS), 99 min.

⁵⁰⁹ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 73.

general) not only impact the lives of ordinary Chechens today, but these values are key to understanding the development of insurgency in Chechnya as well.⁵¹⁰

Chechens have retained a complex set of values which, even today, centers a person's identity in the clan (*teyp*).⁵¹¹ There are divisions and sub-divisions within each clan-grouping that create a strong sense of allegiance and identity for the individual.⁵¹² A person's identity is then locked into the cultural role by the distillation of the Chechen customary law (*adat*) into the customary concept of honor (*siy*).⁵¹³ The concept of male honor in Chechen society still requires a male to avenge a wrong done to him or members of his clan. In drastic cases this can result in a blood feud (*ch'ir*) by the male members of one clan on the offender or their male relatives (boys and women are generally exempt from this part of honor).⁵¹⁴

Additionally, a person's actions, or lack thereof in situations requiring action, can reflect on the clan as a whole. This significant level of normative coherence within Chechen culture insures that a person's individual honor is linked directly to the clan's.⁵¹⁵ In the case of violence or blood feud, it also guarantees that a person's security is ensured by the clan; likewise, the clan's honor is tied to the ability to serve as "the main guardian of the safety of individuals."⁵¹⁶ In addition to male member's honor being tied to the clan's endeavors, there exists a code of silence (*däter*) which imposes strict limits on communication about internal clan business with out-group members.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁰ Emil Souleimanov, "An Ethnography of Counterinsurgency: Kadyrovtsy and Russia's Policy of Chechenization," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31, no. 2 (2015): 95–96.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵¹² John Arquilla and Theodore Karasik, "Chechnya: A Glimpse of Future Conflict?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 22, no. 3 (1999): 210.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 96–97.

⁵¹⁵ Audrey Cronin, "Russia and Chechnya," in *Democracy and Counterterrorism*, ed. Robert Art and Lousie Richardson, 383–412 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2007), 386.

⁵¹⁶ Piotr Sztompka, *Trust: A Sociological Theory*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 33.

⁵¹⁷ Souleimanov, "An Ethnography of Counterinsurgency," 97.

2. Foundational Guerrilla Warfare

Although scholars disagree about when the North Caucasus were Islamized,⁵¹⁸ there is no debate about the fact that the people of the North Caucasus, including the many ethnic Chechen *teyps*, have always fought outsiders. Russia's interaction with the people of the Caucasus began in earnest in 1783 when Catherine the Great agreed to protect the Orthodox Christian Kingdom of Georgia and, to that end, built a large fortress along the Darial Pass in the Caucasus Mountains called "the rule of the Caucasus," or Vladikavkaz.⁵¹⁹ Russia committed limited personnel and resources to the Caucasus for a number of years, mainly defending a line of forts but occasionally raiding into modern day Chechnya or Dagestan.⁵²⁰

In response, Sheikh Mansur waged a campaign of guerrilla warfare that merged obedience to Sufi Islam under the Murid movement with the fierce, independent culture of the North Caucasus.⁵²¹ Noted as comparable to the Wahabi movement which would be a prevalent part of the second Chechen war, Muridism implored its followers to realize their "most sacred duty and object in life" and "die in battle against the infidel."⁵²² During the five years of resistance, Sheik Mansur succeeded in coalescing a disparate group of North Caucasian tribes and ethnic groups by championing Islam—a common thread over the next two hundred years.⁵²³

In order to project forces South of the Kuban and Terek rivers (the military conquest of the Caucasian tribes), General Yermolov began establishing a line of

⁵¹⁸ Bowers, Akhmadov and Derrick argue that Islamization of the North Caucasus began in the 19th century, where Moore and Tumelty argue that Sufiism (in addition to the underlying cultural independence of the North Caucous clans) was a diving factor to militarized resistance as early as 1780. Regardless of when, it was the Sufi's who brought Islam to the Caucasus.

⁵¹⁹ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 55.

⁵²⁰ Baumann, "Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan," 4–5.

⁵²¹ Moore and Tumelty, "Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya," 75–76.

⁵²² William Edward David Allen and Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border 1828–1921* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁵²³ Moore and Tumelty, "Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya," 76.

garrisons from which he could conduct raids.⁵²⁴ He then instituted a policy of conquest or resettlement, destroying villages and enslaving women along the way, engendering few in the Caucasuses to the Russian expansion.⁵²⁵ He directed the clearing of large forests and building of roads to ease troop movement to conduct further “punitive raids against unsubmissive tribes.”⁵²⁶ The decades of fighting and attempting to “crush the mountaineers in a single, large-scale campaign ended in failure.”⁵²⁷ After nearly four decades of “almost constant guerrilla warfare...the Chechens, Ingush, and Dagestanis had learned the need for unity of command.”⁵²⁸

Imam Shamil was a well-educated, pragmatic, Islamic leader who was able to absorb essential lessons of guerrilla warfare and develop a formidable, unified insurgency against the Russians.⁵²⁹ This time, in addition to the always popular anti-Russian narrative combined with the Islamic imperative to fight, Shamil was able to incorporate outside support from the Ottoman Empire.⁵³⁰ Although Shamil was supported financially by the Turks, his ability to create a coherent resistance movement out of many separate groups is the reason he was successful for three decades, and ultimately why he is memorialized in militant Islam circles today.⁵³¹

Under Shamil’s leadership he withdrew vulnerable populations deeper into the mountains, and created a system of village-to-village support to shelter and feed those

⁵²⁴ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 58–60.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 60–61.

⁵²⁶ Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 9.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵²⁸ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 62.

⁵²⁹ Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 11.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵³¹ Foreign intervention in the Caucasus was not new or isolated to supporting Imam Shamil. The Ottomans supported various factions, at various times throughout the nineteenth century with arms and supplies, including a bid during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–78 to land 3,000 “Circassians and Abkhaz fighters with 30,000 rifles to arm the local population and create an internal uprising to assist the general Turkish war effort.” See Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1860–1917*, 109.

harmful by the Russian forces.⁵³² He reinstated the practice of every tenth household providing a warrior while the other nine provided for that warrior's family.⁵³³ Shamil's system, based on his leadership and centered in Islam, included taxation, local government, and courts; it was this system the Russians would have to replace in addition to defeating Shamil if they were to gain control and legitimacy in the Caucasus.⁵³⁴

Most importantly, he conducted guerrilla operations against the Russians with speed, audacity and deception, seizing a number of Russian outposts and garrisons as well as keeping initiative in the conflict.⁵³⁵ Although Russian forces conducted raids and laid siege to insurgent strongholds, successfully capturing or razing village after village, they were only hollow victories, as Shamil's forces continued to fight.⁵³⁶ The eventual realization that the Caucasus could not be dealt with "in a lightning campaign of destruction but only through years of patient and methodical effort" took hold.⁵³⁷

With the end of the Crimean War in 1856, Russia was able to increase the number of troops to 300,000 in the Caucasus, an all-time high, to ensure the implementation of new tactics and strategy.⁵³⁸ One Russian commander sought to divide Shamil's command by appealing to the tribal and independent nature of Chechens.⁵³⁹ A system of local courts provided a mechanism for conflict resolution external to the radical Islam Shamil enforced.⁵⁴⁰ Russian commander of the Left Flank in Chechnya, Bariatsinskii addressed specific grievances, cultivated the economic relationship and hired local informants.⁵⁴¹ Bariatsinskii enforced discipline and the "importance of a close column" to fend off

⁵³² Baumann, "Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan," 12.

⁵³³ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 66.

⁵³⁴ Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1860–1917*, 120.

⁵³⁵ Baumann, "Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan," 16–19.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

ambushes—something that would become particularly useful in Central Asia.⁵⁴² He also stressed well planned, independent maneuver and deception operations by independent columns to “neutralize the superior mobility of Shamil’s guerrillas and deny the mountaineers the initiative.”⁵⁴³ The Russian tactics of displacement and scorched earth reshaped the environment by removing hundreds of thousands of natives and replacing them with Cossack settlers.⁵⁴⁴ It also fomented opposition to direct Russian rule—a legacy alive and well today.⁵⁴⁵ Only after a “patient, methodical approach to the war with a larger commitment of forces” was Russia able to “systematically reduce the territory and population under their control.”⁵⁴⁶

3. Radicals Rise

In an attempt to nullify anti-communist resistance early, the Bolsheviks incorporated a Muslim Committee as early as 1917.⁵⁴⁷ The Muslim Committee was established to better incorporate Muslims into the revolution by granting those participants greater autonomy. This practice tended to promote radical leaders within the Muslim community and as the turmoil of the Russian Revolution was coming to a head, a prominent Chechen leader, Sheikh Uzen Haji al-Salty declared the North Caucasus region an Emirate and declared jihad against the Russian forces (now trying to quash any real or perceived threat to power).⁵⁴⁸ This proclamation by al-Salty again drew support from outside of Chechnya. It eventually led Imam Shamil’s great grandson to “travel from Turkey to Chechnya in support of the guerrilla war” which highlights the “links between external groups in Turkey and the anti-Russian resistance.”⁵⁴⁹ Uzen Haji died in 1920 and most of the anti-Russian movement died with him. However, that did not lessen

⁵⁴² Ibid., 35.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 61.

⁵⁴⁶ Baumann, “Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan,” 5.

⁵⁴⁷ Allworth, *Central Asia, 130 Years of Russian Dominance*, 187–89.

⁵⁴⁸ Moore and Tumelty, “Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya,” 79.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 79–80.

the fractured nature of Chechnya. As Stalin consolidated power, he purged leaders he could not fully trust. In Chechnya, that included pro-Bolshevik leaders who were also Chechen or Caucasus nationalists.⁵⁵⁰

Resistance to Russia and later the Soviet Union lasted in various forms until Stalin ordered the deportation of many natives of the North Caucasus (accused of Nazi collaboration) in 1944, including most Chechens.⁵⁵¹ Deportation and mass murder were favorite policy tools of the Soviets under Stalin.⁵⁵² Estimates vary, but it is reported that one quarter of the entire deported Chechen population—nearly 125,000 of the roughly 500,000 deported—died as a result of the resettlement alone.⁵⁵³ The Soviet military was particularly brutal during the forced deportation. They annihilated entire populations that refused the order as well as denuded the mountains to deny the historic safe haven to would be insurgents.⁵⁵⁴ Later, this mass deportation would serve as an extremely important unifying point for Chechens, but from the deportation until the 1980s, Soviet suffocation of Chechnya left Islam as “little more than a household tradition and mark of ethnic identity” in the North Caucasus.⁵⁵⁵

B. THE NATIONALIST CAMPAIGN, OR “FIRST” CHECHEN WAR

As the Soviet empire collapsed, Moscow lost temporarily much of its ability to control the peripheral states within the union. In Chechnya, that meant the election of Chechen nationalist Dzhokhar Dudayev in October 1991. Dudayev’s first action as president was to declare Chechnya an independent state, which Boris Yeltsin subsequently pronounced as illegal and sent 2,500 Interior Ministry troops to bring

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ This deportation included over 30,000 Chechens from neighboring Dagestan who were removed during the 1944 resettlement. John B Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 65.

⁵⁵² Ibid., 61–65.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 67, 70–71.

⁵⁵⁴ Souleimanov, “An Ethnography of Counterinsurgency,” 98.

⁵⁵⁵ Stephen Bowers, Yavus Akhmadov, Ashley Derrick, “Islam in Ingushetia and Chechnya,” *The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies* 29, no. 4 (2004), 395.

Chechnya back into the fold.⁵⁵⁶ Before the troops were employed, the Russian parliament rescinded Yeltsin's order. As a consequence, Dudayev was elevated in stature in Chechnya as a leader who stood up to Moscow and won.⁵⁵⁷ The slight was not forgotten by the political elite in Moscow and in November, 1994 (during a Russian election cycle), Moscow-loyal fighters tried to overthrow Dudayev.⁵⁵⁸ The coup did not succeed and forced Yeltsin to intervene directly.

Russian troops were poorly prepared for the combat they faced in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. What followed was brutal urban warfare and guerrilla tactics of the first Chechen war. The ex-Soviet force sent into Grozny was told to expect little to no resistance.⁵⁵⁹ The Russian troops were mostly ill equipped and poorly trained conscripts fighting in an unpopular war.⁵⁶⁰ Aslan Maskhadov, the former Soviet artillery Colonel turned Chief of Defense for Chechnya, prepared an irregular defense and quickly routed the pro-Moscow forces.⁵⁶¹

The resistance fighters were highly networked and lived up to their traditions of being fierce fighters and ethno-nationalists, even though many of the leaders had been born in exile or lived abroad the majority of their lives.⁵⁶² The various clans and families united against the invading army under Maskhadov's leadership. The forces were also well prepared for the invading Russian army, by some estimates preparing defenses for urban combat for over three months.⁵⁶³ The rebels were organized into "small bands of lightly-armed fighters."⁵⁶⁴ These small groups were exceptionally flexible and able to

⁵⁵⁶ Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*, STU-Student edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 131.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 262.

⁵⁵⁹ Olga Oliker, *Russia's Chechen Wars 1994–2000: Lessons from Urban Combat* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001), 29.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, 256.

⁵⁶² Moore and Tumelty, "Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya," 83.

⁵⁶³ Oliker, *Russia's Chechen Wars 1994–2000*, 34.

⁵⁶⁴ John Arquilla and Theodore Karasik, "Chechnya: A Glimpse of Future Conflict?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 22, No. 3 (1999): 212.

make full use of the urban terrain, getting very close to and blocking off Russian armored columns.⁵⁶⁵ These independent insurgents “were able to make kill shots” with “shoulder-fired anti-tank weapons and anti-tank grenades” while suffering relatively few casualties because multiple Chechen teams were acting in conjunction with each other while not requiring direct coordination.⁵⁶⁶

The Russians defended these attacks with several adaptations. They created ad hoc combined arms elements called storm groups, bringing massive amounts of firepower to a company-sized element.⁵⁶⁷ They also re-introduced vehicle adaptations from their experience in Afghanistan, such as screening around vehicles to protect from anti-armor shape charges.⁵⁶⁸ Russian troops also incorporated heavy weapons with greater capability to elevate or depress, enabling forces to fire on Chechen positions.⁵⁶⁹

Eventually, Russian forces ground Grozny and the Chechen elements defending it down to a point where they took to the safety of the Caucasus Mountains.⁵⁷⁰ Russia pursued a coercive strategy targeting civilians, similar to the early 1800s.⁵⁷¹ Russian brutality became as notorious as the guerrillas’ (there are videos of Chechen fighters beheading Russian soldiers).⁵⁷² The Russians employed “cleansing” operations (*zachistka*), which were officially house-to-house searches but became “synonymous with looting, violence and mass detentions.”⁵⁷³

Meanwhile, President Dudayev, concerned about lacking significant Muslim credentials, appointed Islam Khalimov as a religious advisor to appeal to a broader base

⁵⁶⁵ Lester W. Grau, *Russian Urban Tactics: Lessons from the Battle for Grozny*, Strategic Forum 38 (Washington, DC: National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1995), 2, <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS63224>.

⁵⁶⁶ Arquilla and Karasik, “Chechnya,” 213–214.

⁵⁶⁷ Grau, *Russian Urban Tactics*, 2–3.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁶⁹ Oliker, *Russia’s Chechen Wars 1994–2000*, 40.

⁵⁷⁰ Arquilla and Karasik, “Chechnya,” 211.

⁵⁷¹ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 129.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Carlotta Gall and Thomas De Waal, *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York, NY, 1998).

of Chechen support.⁵⁷⁴ As the war progressed and intensified, it strengthened the religious nature of the Chechen population and gave rise to Chechnya as a rallying cry and *cause célèbre* for Muslims around the world. This increased awareness by Muslim communities drew funding and recruitment from more radical sources abroad.⁵⁷⁵

1. The Budennovsk Raid

Slightly more than half a year into the first Chechen war, it appeared that Russian had won. Grozny, what was left of it, was under a Russian flag, as were all towns and most of the villages. Russian forces controlled every major crossroads in Chechnya. The guerrilla fighters were still conducting harassing attacks in the southwest, small scale raids and ambushes, but the main resistance had just been pushed out of the last population center under their control. Maskhadov and Basayev had both been in the area leading the defenses there, and when it appeared that Russian forces would overwhelm them, they conducted a rapid retreat into the mountains.⁵⁷⁶

It was during this June retreat that Maskhadov and Basayev, still closely working together, planned the operation in Budennovsk. Some question if the hospital in Budennovsk was the original target or a target of opportunity. History is not afforded the luxury of knowing the selection process of the 150 fighters Basayev took with him, if he conducted dedicated rehearsals and reconnaissance prior to the operation or simply piled men into vehicles and bribed his way through check points. What is recorded is that his raiding force reached the town of Budennovsk, Russia 240 kilometers from their safe operating area with the element of surprise intact.

Once in the town center the fighters stormed the administrative building and the police station. The fighters encountered a vehicle with several Russian pilots from a nearby air base and shot them. After ransacking the town and murdering dozens of innocents, Basayev had his fighters rounded up hundreds of villagers and brought them to

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Robert Pringle, James Ciment, *World Terrorism: An Encyclopedia of Political Violence from Ancient Times to the Post-9/11 Era* (Armonk, NY: Routledge, 2015), 423.

⁵⁷⁶ Sebastian Smith, *Allah's Mountains: The Battle for Chechnya, New Edition* (New York, NY: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2005), 198–200.

the Budennovsk hospital. His fighters found several other Russian airmen among the group and executed them as well. Reports vary but Basayev ended up holding over 1,500 hostages.⁵⁷⁷

The Chechen fighters immediately barricaded themselves in the hospital with mines, machineguns, rocket propelled grenades and snipers. Basayev demanded that Russian cease combat in Chechnya and withdraw its forces. While the Chechen fighters hid behind hostages President Yeltsin was abroad, so the authority to deal with the growing incident landed in the lap of Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.⁵⁷⁸

Unlike the more closely controlled access to the conflict in Chechnya, the bloodbath in Budennovsk was widely reported and captured the attention of the Russian population. Any discourse between Basayev and Russian forces on the ground ended with the same demand – remove the Russian troops from Chechnya. So, the elite commando unit Alpha led an assault on the barricaded Chechen force. It was bloodily repulsed by the Chechen fighters.⁵⁷⁹

Quickly, the Russians mounted another assault, this one backed by armored vehicles blasting away at the hospital entrances where hostages held white sheets. Although the hostages quickly hid during the intense crossfire it did little to reduce their casualties. Still, the Chechen fighters held out. The failure of the “Budennovsk hospital storming was humiliating” for the Russians.⁵⁸⁰

So humiliating was the failure that Viktor Chernomyrdin personally negotiated with Shamil Basayev to end the siege. Basayev not only received safe transport back to the mountains of Chechnya, but Russia came to the negotiation table under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. This relatively small tactical

⁵⁷⁷ Smith, *Allah's Mountains*, 200–201.

⁵⁷⁸ Arquillia, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Banits*, 259.

⁵⁷⁹ Andrew Felkay, *Yeltsin's Russia and the West* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 125.

⁵⁸⁰ Smith, *Allah's Mountains*, 202.

victory was also significant in that it marked the first in a long succession of terrorist acts outside of the conflict area.⁵⁸¹

In an impressive seizure of the initiative, Chechen guerrillas infiltrated Grozny and captured several key facilities.⁵⁸² Within hours of the initial attack, Russian garrisons found themselves cut off and having to attack a well prepared enemy.⁵⁸³ Using similar tactics, the Chechen fighters succeeded in sealing off the main avenues of approach to the city, “restricting Russia’s ability to reinforce” elements in the city.⁵⁸⁴ During a previous raid three months prior, Chechen fighters had tested infiltration routes, conducted attacks to judge Russian response times, and “seized Russian weapons depots, which they then cached *within the city*,” all in preparation for the assault.⁵⁸⁵ Fighting continued for weeks, costing thousands of additional lives before a cease-fire agreement was worked out.⁵⁸⁶

The Budennovsk incident and the surprise assault on Grozny, “led Moscow to sign the Kasavyurt Accords.”⁵⁸⁷ The losses on both sides were as staggering as the atrocities they committed. As many as 14,000 Russian troops were killed, a figure dwarfed by the 50,000 Chechens civilians that were killed.⁵⁸⁸

2. Governance Failure and Rise of the Islamic Republic of the North Caucasus

In the end it did not matter how inclusive Maskhadov’s presidency was after the conclusion of the first Chechen war, or that he was elected in an internationally recognized fair election with nearly 70 percent of the vote. Maskhadov began to lose control to criminals, thugs and religious zealots. They rose up because Maskhadov’s government was unable to provide services of nearly any kind or improve the quality of

⁵⁸¹ Cronin, *Russia and Chechnya*, 394.

⁵⁸² Olikier, *Russia’s Chechen Wars 1994–2000*, 44.

⁵⁸³ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 141.

⁵⁸⁴ Olikier, *Russia’s Chechen Wars 1994–2000*, 44.

⁵⁸⁵ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 141.

⁵⁸⁶ Olikier, *Russia’s Chechen Wars 1994–2000*, 46.

⁵⁸⁷ Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*, 132–133.

⁵⁸⁸ Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*, 132.

life for most Chechens. They were used in some small way during the war, but stayed after the war's conclusion and metastasized into a direct threat to Maskhadov's leadership, changing the very nature of the conflict from nationalist to religious.

President, Maskhadov was more concerned with national Chechen issues than the religious ideologues who immediately challenged him in favor of implementing Sharia law.⁵⁸⁹ Maskhadov, attempting to appeal to the moderate, traditional Sufi adherents, moved to expel Salafis (including radical foreign fighters) from Gudermes, Chechnya. When Maskhadov's forces arrived to expel the radicals, his forces were met with armed resistance.⁵⁹⁰ The core of that radical group emanated from a conglomeration of radicals including Jordanian, Turkish, Arab and North African Muslims who came to Chechnya to fight.

Those foreign fighters were influenced in large part by Ibn al-Khattab, a well-connected Saudi living in Chechnya. Khattab had been guided through Afghanistan by Hassan as-Sarehi, and knew both Osama bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam. Khattab brought those connections to Chechnya where he "emphasized the value of propaganda and released dozens of tapes both to frame the Chechen fight as part of a global jihad and to describe the plight of the Chechens and the endeavors of the mujahideen."⁵⁹¹ Khattab and other radicals were fueled by the millions of dollars in aid given by Muslim charities and organizations, as well as had significant connection to many pan-Islamic radical organizations, not just al-Qaeda.⁵⁹²

Later, in an effort to appease the likes of Shamil Basayev, Maskhadov acquiesced to their demands and adopted Sharia law across Chechnya. This did little to appease the extremists. External, radical influence continued to pour in, along with financing. Sharia supporters recruited and incorporated Islamic fundamentalists from across southern Russia and Central Asia and set up in radical enclaves for "training as well as political

⁵⁸⁹ Moore and Tumelty, "Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya," 84.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁹¹ Lorenzo Vidino, "How Chechnya Became a Breeding Ground for Terror," *Middle East Quarterly*, June 1, 2005, <http://www.meforum.org/744/how-chechnya-became-a-breeding-ground-for-terror>, 57–61.

⁵⁹² Pringle, *World Terrorism*, 423. Moore and Tumelty, "Assessing Unholy Alliances in Chechnya," 84–85.

and religious indoctrination.”⁵⁹³ The factions within Chechnya became so polarized that, although Maskhadov still had extensive popular support, there were several assassination attempts in 1998 and 1999.⁵⁹⁴

C. PUTIN’S WAR—THE “SECOND” CHECHEN WAR

At the behest of Ibn al-Khattab, Basayev directed cross-border raids from Chechnya into Dagestan to support several villages which declared allegiance to the Islamic Republic of the North Caucasus and implemented sharia law.⁵⁹⁵ These raids were tactical failures; they were quickly rebuffed by Dagestani and Russian security forces.

Four apartment buildings in Moscow and other towns in Russia were bombed in the middle of the night causing hundreds of casualties in the fall of 1999. Days later, two suspects were arrested placing sacks of white powder and devices on an apartment building.⁵⁹⁶ The two men turned out to be FSB agents and the bombs they planted were real and similar to the earlier bombs.⁵⁹⁷ The explosives were military grade, as were the failed detonating devices.⁵⁹⁸ But those facts were brushed aside as then-prime minister Vladimir Putin expressed outrage at Chechen rebels who were blamed for the bombings.⁵⁹⁹ Later, the agent who had rented the basement where they were caught planting the bomb “was killed in a hit-and-run car accident that was never solved;” another person investigating the issue was convicted at a secret tribunal; four additional people investigating Russian government “involvement were killed under mysterious circumstances.”⁶⁰⁰ Even though any Chechen connection to the four apartment bombings

⁵⁹³ Mark Kramer, “The Perils of Counterinsurgency: Russia’s War in Chechnya,” *International Security* 29, no. 3 (Winter 2004/05): 5–63, doi:10.1162/0162288043467450.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Jeffrey Bale, Jeffrey Bale, “The Chechen Resistance and Radiological Terrorism | NTL,” *NTI: Nuclear Threat Initiative*, accessed December 14, 2015, <http://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/chechen-resistance-radiological-terror/>.

⁵⁹⁶ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 185.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Neil Docherty, “Putin’s Way,” *Frontline*, January 13, 2015, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/putins-way/>.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 186.

in 1999 is “dubious,” to most Russians this was their equivalent of the 9/11 attacks.⁶⁰¹ It was used as a rallying cry for the Russian public and a mechanism to smooth the political Yeltsin-Putin power transition.⁶⁰² The raids were used by Vladimir Putin, in conjunction with the bombing of the four apartment buildings, as justification for the second Chechen war.⁶⁰³

Russian forces staged in neighboring Dagestan for weeks preparing for the invasion, and when they did invade they encircled Grozny instead of driving armored columns into the heart of the city, then they pummeled the city with artillery and aerial bombardment.⁶⁰⁴ The initial Russian strategy seemed to be reliant on air and artillery to bomb Grozny into submission. That lasted from October until late December, 1999 when Russian forces, with significant pro-Moscow Chechen militia help, “fought to capture the airport in the Khankala suburb” of Grozny.⁶⁰⁵

Once the battle for Grozny was underway in earnest, it became apparent that Russia’s invading force had divested itself of cold war tactics. The force of nearly 100,000 soldiers included Russian *spetsnaz* and elite infantry forces.⁶⁰⁶ The Russian plan required the forces be broken into attack groups of 30–50 men, supported by air and artillery bombardment once enemy positions were identified.⁶⁰⁷ These groups were specifically organized to be mobile and flexible in an urban environment. Each detachment had a broad cross section of soldiers and a variety of weapons such as sappers, forward observers, snipers, flame throwers and automatic weapons gunners who would use impressive fire power to deny any location to a resistance fighter.⁶⁰⁸ These detachments would dig out the remaining resistance once armored elements secured a

⁶⁰¹ Docherty, “Putin’s Way.”

⁶⁰² Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 186.

⁶⁰³ Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, 262–263.

⁶⁰⁴ Olikier, *Russia’s Chechen Wars 1994–2000*.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 43–45.

⁶⁰⁶ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 198–190.

⁶⁰⁷ Olikier, *Russia’s Chechen Wars 1994–2000*, 43–46.

⁶⁰⁸ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 190.

foot hold in the urban environment.⁶⁰⁹ Even the motivation of the individual Russian soldier was better during the second Chechen war, and when compared to the now fractured Chechen resistance, Russian morale was generally higher.⁶¹⁰

This is not to say that Maskhadov, Basayev or their contemporaries were in any way defeated from the outset. They certainly still believed in repelling the invading force, and established a defense of Chechnya and Grozny to do exactly that. Chechen forces successfully bled Russian troops through ambushes and raids in the country side and on the fringes of Grozny. While suffering significant casualties themselves, they extracted far more on the Russians in the street fighting in Grozny. The Russian forces were only able to advance about 100 meters per day.⁶¹¹

Chechen guerrillas continued to blend into the civilian population and even into the Russian soldiery at times. Once Grozny was taken by the Russians, the Chechen guerrilla forces melted into the Caucasus Mountains to rely on their support structure, take advantage of the terrain and exploit the seams of international boundaries.⁶¹²

Maskhadov was hoping that he could hold his forces together long enough and inflict significant casualties to bring the Russians to the negotiating table as at the end of the first Chechen war. The problem for Maskhadov was that he was fighting to keep his divergent group of groups together at the same time he was fighting a guerrilla war against the Russian army.⁶¹³ Maskhadov was employing improvised explosive devices against troops and vehicles to great success. He employed a cadre of very well trained snipers both in the Russian's rear areas as well as in support of operations. He directed small teams to infiltrate enemy positions and specifically targeted Russian helicopters, critical to the tactics employed by the Russian forces, destroying nine helicopters in six months of fighting,⁶¹⁴ and thirty-six helicopters in three years of fighting. One of the

⁶⁰⁹ Olikier, *Russia's Chechen Wars 1994–2000*, 43–45.

⁶¹⁰ Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*, 395.

⁶¹¹ Olikier, *Russia's Chechen Wars 1994–2000*, 46.

⁶¹² Ibid., 396–397.

⁶¹³ Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, 264.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

attacks against an Mi-26 transport helicopter killed 127 people. The aircraft was overcrowded by Russian commanders because there were only two of the large transports in Chechnya at the time.⁶¹⁵

The Chechens' campaign of improvised explosive devices was so successful that Col. Trushkov, head of engineer forces, later stated the explosives caused "roughly 40 percent of the casualties" Russia suffered early in the second Chechen war. During the first year of the conflict, Russian forces were faced with 20 devices a day on average.⁶¹⁶

To counter these threats, Russian *spetsnaz* and naval infantry developed and employed small-unit and insurgent-like tactics.⁶¹⁷ Small, highly mobile detachments combined with significant intelligence capabilities (via pro-Moscow Chechens) increased Russian effectiveness against the insurgents.⁶¹⁸ The Russians also used lesson from several years of combat as well as former insurgents to defeat improvised explosive devices and ambushes.⁶¹⁹

Russian commanders also implemented directives to understand the culture, treat Chechens with respect, deal with people calmly, and exercise restraint—all sound and basic principals of counterinsurgency.⁶²⁰ Although the impact of such directives seems limited outside of elite Russian units, as Human Rights Watch (among others) notes "the use of indiscriminate violence, forced disappearances (about 5,000 since 1999), and extrajudicial killings" in addition to "theft, torture, kidnapping, and sheer wanton destruction."⁶²¹

⁶¹⁵ Kramer, "The Perils of Counterinsurgency," 35.

⁶¹⁶ Kramer, "The Perils of Counterinsurgency," 25–26.

⁶¹⁷ Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, 263.

⁶¹⁸ Timothy Thomas, "Russian Tactical Lessons Learned Fighting Chechen Separatists," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 18, no. 4 (2005): 757.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 746–47.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 751–54.

⁶²¹ Jason Lyall, "Are Coethnics More Effective Counterinsurgents? Evidence from the Second Chechen War," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 1 (February 2010): 3, doi:10.1017/S0003055409990323.

Russia switched from a near-scorched earth policy to a divide and conquer policy. Moscow directed the transfer of “political power to approved Chechen officials who supported the Kremlin’s efforts to keep Chechnya within Russia’s legal fold.”⁶²² Putin chose Akhmad Kadyrov, who fought against Russia in the “First” Chechen War, to lead the “Chechenization.”⁶²³

As in Afghanistan, after realizing firepower and Russian units alone would not achieve the desired results, Russia began the process of turning over responsibility for combat operations to local forces. Russia created joint Russian-Chechen and pure pro-Russian Chechen units in early 2003, eventually shifting most of the *zachistki* responsibility to Chechen forces.⁶²⁴

To that end, three main types of Chechen forces were employed by the Kadyrov government, those who were also loyal to Moscow, those who left the insurgency to support the Kadyrov government (both types under the Ministry of Defense), and an irregular militia loyal to Kadyrov himself called the *kadyrovtsy*.⁶²⁵ These all-Chechen formations took over direct combat operations, as well as the *zachistki* operations from the Russians.⁶²⁶ Jason Lyall claims that this Chechen-on-Chechen approach led to one-third fewer post-sweep attacks as compared to when Russian troops swept Chechen villages.⁶²⁷

While the forces led by Maskhadov were busy planting bombs along the roads used by Russian forces in Chechnya, Basayev was encouraging his forces to export terror to Russia itself to shake the resolve of the Russian people. Unlike Basayev’s raid on Budennovsk which led to the negotiation table, his export of terror to Russia proper hardened the resolve of Vladimir Putin to continue the war in Chechnya.

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ Joshua Yaffa, “Putin’s Dragon,” *The New Yorker*, February 8, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/02/08/putins-dragon>.

⁶²⁴ Lyall, “Are Coethnics More Effective Counterinsurgents?,” 2.

⁶²⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 2.

The first target of terror outside of Chechnya was the now infamous attack on the Moscow opera house in October 2002. Russian forces gassed and then stormed the building killing all of the hostage takers and a significant number of hostages. There was a string of suicide bombings, nine in 2003 alone,⁶²⁸ conducted by the so called Black Widows. In August 2004 two Black Widows boarded separate planes and detonated their bombs. Thirty Chechen fighters captured over a thousand hostages in what is referred to as the Beslan school incident. It too was unsuccessful, not because the raid on the school resulted in four hundred hostages dead, but because it redoubled the Russian resolve to fight Chechen radicals.⁶²⁹

In 2004 and 2005 it seemed the harder the Russians pushed the Chechen fighters, the wider the conflict was spreading. Raids against Chechen guerrillas were answered by ambush and echoed by acts of terror in seemingly safe areas deep within Russia. During this horrific spiral of violence Maskhadov continued to seek out an opportunity to negotiate peace. In an effort to achieve peace, Maskhadov unilaterally declared a cease fire, which may have worked if Maskhadov still controlled all of the rebel Chechen factions.⁶³⁰

Maskhadov was killed under unusual circumstances during a raid. In the death of Maskhadov, Russia lost the most mainstream Chechen leader and the resistance weakened for want of Maskhadov's leadership. Resistance to Russian forces and the pro-Moscow government in Grozny did not vanish but it lessened considerably.⁶³¹ There are still acts of terror in Russia and ambushes on security and police forces in Chechnya but they have lost nearly all effectiveness the Chechen resistance forces once had.

1. Success and Failure in the Caucasus

James Kiras suggested that the shock and paralysis caused in an enemy by a special operation is short and that "the nature of war and friction suggests that there is no

⁶²⁸ Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*, 404.

⁶²⁹ Arquillia, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, 264–265.

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

⁶³¹ Ibid., 266.

way of knowing the depth and duration of its effect.”⁶³² That is simply not the case for the Budennovsk raid. The raid achieved its strategic effect when Basayev returned to a hero’s welcome in Chechnya. It achieved resounding strategic utility by bringing forcing Viktor Chernomyrdin to negotiate. It certainly achieved more than expected when the Russians (and Chechens) followed through with the negotiations and peace that followed.

2. The Dubrovka Theater

Basayev and other Chechen commanders began to plan and execute operations outside of Chechnya frequently during the second Chechen war. The Chechen commanders, minus Maskhadov’s following, believed that exporting terror to Russia, specifically attacks in Moscow, would turn public opinion in Russian against the war in Chechnya.⁶³³ This desire to bring the fight to the enemy was also coupled with an increase in suicide bombers, which was a direct reflection of radical Islamic influence among this segment of the Chechen resistance. So, although captivating and terrible, the hostage crisis at the Dubrovka Theater lacked the punch of Basaeyv’s raid on Budennovsk.

Several fighters jumped on stage and fired their weapons into the air during the second act of a World War II musical. It took spectators a few moments to realize that these were not actors in “Nord-Ost” but were in fact Chechen commandos, and the spectators were now hostages.⁶³⁴ The Kremlin was faced with another attack, this time there were nearly 1,000 hostages only five kilometers from the Kremlin.⁶³⁵

The 53 Chechen rebels who stormed the Dubrovka Theater were all volunteers from a group called Kamikaze of Islam, led by Movsar Barayev.⁶³⁶ They had been hand selected and trained extensively for months prior to the execution. A few members of the

⁶³² James D. Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy: From World War II to the War on Terrorism*, 1 edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006).

⁶³³ Kramer, “The Perils of Counterinsurgency,” 50.

⁶³⁴ Adam Dolnik and Richard Pilch, “The Moscow Theater Hostage Crisis: The Perpetrators, Their Tactics, and the Russian Response,” *International Negotiation* 8, no. 3 (October 1, 2003): 577–611, doi:10.1163/1571806031310798, 587–588.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 588.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, 586.

group were selected for reconnaissance and preparation of the theater, so they travel to Moscow and got jobs as construction workers in the building next door. They attended the musical several times, smuggled weapons and ammunitions into Moscow and set up caches near the theater.⁶³⁷

Once the hostages were under control the building was wired with explosives in at least 30 locations. All 18 female terrorists were wearing suicide belts. About two hours later a prerecorded demand was delivered to Al-Jazeera Moscow stating the terrorists' demand that Russia pull all troops out of Chechnya. The Chechens released nearly 200 people shortly after the video was aired.⁶³⁸

There were several tense moments of the next few days, including times where hostages tried to escape or attack their captives.⁶³⁹ During all of it the Chechens negotiated through interlocutors but stuck to their demand. As the Chechens negotiated into the fourth day of the crisis, Russian Spetsnaz prepared to assault the building. Once assault teams were in place, they used a gas to incapacitate the terrorists.⁶⁴⁰ Although this certainly alerted the Chechen forces to the pending assault, there was not much the fighters could do in response.⁶⁴¹

There were three progressive breaches and based on the reports of gunfire, there were still a few Chechen fighters awake and alert enough to shoot back.⁶⁴² However, none of the Chechen explosive devices were detonated. 126 hostages died from exposure to that gas used by the Spetsnaz forces, two more were shot to death in the rescue.⁶⁴³

The Chechen fighters were successful at bringing the war to Moscow, thrusting the war into the public and at sacrificing for their cause, but that is where their success ends. They failed to embarrass Russian leadership. When Shamil Basayev released a

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 587.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

⁶³⁹ Dolnik and Pilch, "The Moscow Theater Hostage Crisis," 583–84.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 585.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

⁶⁴² Ibid.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

statement stating that “Russian leadership will without mercy slaughter its own citizens in the middle of Moscow,” it failed to resonate with Russians. He was trying to duplicate his past success of showing the Russians as ruthless, bringing the Chechen conflict to the forefront of the Russian psyche and ultimately bring Moscow to the negotiation table.

There were several flawed assumptions which went into the planning of this mission. The first problem with Basayev’s strategy is overuse causes desensitization. As James Kiras stated, “shock is a short lived phenomenon,”⁶⁴⁴ and a spectacular attack ceases to be spectacular if it occurs regularly. A raid such as the Dubrovka Theater attack ceases to have much if any strategic value if it cannot produce the intended deep emotional and psychological reaction in the enemy or target audience. The second issue is that Russian leadership had changed, had learned from the previous Chechen war and vowed not to be weak in the face of terrorism. Third, the Dubrovka Theater incident not only failed to force Russia to the negotiation table, but it allowed the Russian leadership to frame Chechen groups in terms of the global war on terror and thus garner international support against part of its domestic problem.

Overall, the Chechen force certainly exercised a high level of economy of force. While the operation was very well planned, rehearsed and executed, it had significantly less shock value because it came on the heels of other similar operations. In this case, Russian Spetsnaz used gas to subdue the Chechen terrorist causing tactical failure on the part of the Chechens. The Chechen operation also failed to achieve their strategic goals. Because Chechen leadership miscalculated their opponent’s actions, they conducted an operation that ended with strategic disutility. Moscow became even more resolute in their fight against the Chechen rebels. Russia enlisted international help in tracking and defunding Chechen terrorist groups. Putin began working with Moscow-friendly Chechens and a campaign of leadership targeting which together decimated Chechen insurgent leadership. The Dubrovka Theater hostage incident backfired on the Chechen terrorists.

⁶⁴⁴ James D. Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy*, 77.

3. Conclusion of the “Second” Conflict

The failure of Aslan Maskhadov to hold a cohesive Chechen government together is a great tragedy by an otherwise phenomenal leader. As Anatol Lieven put it, Aslan Maskhadov was a “rare and original genius – which makes his failure to ensure stability or effective government in post-war Chechnya all the more tragic.”⁶⁴⁵ The fractured nature of the Chechen resistance after the introduction of radical Islam became too much for Maskhadov.

It was this split which allowed for the increased use of terror tactics in Russia and the incorporation of suicide attacks. In Putin’s Russia and the post-9/11 world, connections to radical Islam and terror tactics made Chechen groups more of a legitimate target rather than less of one. As Akhmad Kadyrov (later Ramzan Kadyrov, after his father’s assassination) consolidated power by making alliances with other strong tribes in Chechnya, Putin began to transfer significant sums of money to the Kadyrov government to rebuild Grozny and Chechnya.⁶⁴⁶

Chechen units, supported by Russian intelligence, continue to make progress against the insurgents.⁶⁴⁷ In 2015 there were only fourteen people killed by the insurgency, a drop from 82 in 2012, and from 95 in 2011.⁶⁴⁸ The problem is, as Varvara Pakhomenko stated, that “Chechnya [now] is Russia’s *avant-garde*.”⁶⁴⁹ While there may be militant Islamic Chechen fighters involved in conflicts globally, there may also be *kadyrovtsy* prowling around, henchmen loyal only to Kadyrov and by proxy, Putin.

⁶⁴⁵ Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

⁶⁴⁶ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 234.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 235.

⁶⁴⁸ Yaffa, “Putin’s Dragon.”

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

D. WHERE DOES IT GO FROM HERE?

In 2014, Chechen fighters took part in the conflict in Ukraine. Volunteer elements fought on both sides of the conflict, and at times, against each other.⁶⁵⁰ In 2015, a grisly video was released showing a pro-Islamic State Chechen in Syria behead another Chechen, presumably working for the Russian forces on the ground.⁶⁵¹

When Russia invaded Ukraine, a significant number of Chechen diaspora population traveled to Ukraine to fight the Russians in several Chechen battalions. Interestingly, a small number of people who fought with the Chechen battalions were from other ex-Soviet states. All were Muslim and as the commander of the Sheikh Mansur battalion said, “The war for us never ended. We like to fight the Russians, we always fight the Russians.”⁶⁵²

At a time when most of Europe was unwilling to support Ukraine with anything other than words, the fact that militant Muslims were willing to travel to a war zone and fight Russia should be noted. If the United States or others were willing to use a proxy force against Russia in Ukraine, the Chechens have shown themselves willing and able to do so. Although the latent potential is probably somewhat limited, it does exist. And after all, as Isa Munayev said in his interview with Andrew Kramer, “It’s beneficial for Europe that we fight here as volunteers. But not everybody understands.”⁶⁵³

Today, as Russian forces continue to have success targeting the leadership of the Islamic Caucasus Emirate in the Northern Caucasus, Chechens continue to travel to and fight in Syria.⁶⁵⁴ Once there, some groups have supported Al Nusrah Front and others the

⁶⁵⁰ Andrew E. Kramer, “Islamic Battalions, Stocked With Chechens, Aid Ukraine in War With Rebels,” *The New York Times*, July 7, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/08/world/europe/islamic-battalions-stocked-with-chechens-aid-ukraine-in-war-with-rebels.html>.

⁶⁵¹ Siobhan O’grady, “Now You’ve Got Russians Beheading Russians,” *Foreign Policy*, December 2, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/12/02/now-youve-got-russians-beheading-russians/>.

⁶⁵² Kramer, “Islamic Battalions, Stocked With Chechens.”

⁶⁵³ Ibid. Anna Nemtsova, “Chechen Jihadis Leave Syria, Join the Fight in Ukraine,” *The Daily Beast*, September 4, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/09/04/chechen-jihadists-leave-syria-join-the-fight-in-urkaine.html>.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid.

Islamic State.⁶⁵⁵ The problem is that what happens in Syria does not stay in Syria. After these fighters receive additional radicalization and significant front line military experience, many of them depart Syria. Some of the fighters have recently moved from the Syrian battlefield to Ukraine.⁶⁵⁶ This move bolsters the Chechen units which have been fighting in Ukraine for a year. It also directly serves the Islamic State's desire to establish the *Qoqaz*, or a unified Northern and Southern Caucasus caliphate. Lastly, the move from Syria to Ukraine shows how well connected many of these Chechens have become and how pervasive a problem they could be.

The cellular network, based on deep tribal and familial ties may spread with these fighters, or it may become a less potent organizational tool for Chechen fighters going abroad. It is a potential that, in addition to novel tactics and hardcore fighters exported by these natural irregular warriors, these global connections infused with the Chechen sense of community leads to a heretofore unheralded brand of international terrorism. Any direction these now-globally networked fighters take will be a threat to Russian interests and possible to the west in general. One should expect Russia to attempt to counter the globalization of the Chechen network insofar as they are able.

Perhaps predictably, the linkage of ISIS-affiliated Chechens returning home, or roaming Ingushetia, or Dagestan and linking back to the Levant has Russia so worried that Moscow has asked Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov to employ hunter-killer teams on the ground in Syria, which he did.⁶⁵⁷ This divide-and-conquer move continues to export the Chechen-on-Chechen violence across the globe, rather than diminish it. It may have been an effective tool in the middle of the nineteenth century, but it has had limited effect as of late. As was recently demonstrated—by the video released of an ISIS affiliated Chechen beheading a Kadyrov-loyal Chechen—this hatred runs deep.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ Theodore Karasik, "Chechens Face an Epic Battle in Syria," *Al Arabiya*, 22 September 2015, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://ara.tv/v8bbn>.

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VIII. RUSSIAN IRREGULAR WARFARE IN UKRAINE

The post-Cold War “peace dividend” shifted the United States’ focus from competition to cooperation with the former Soviet Bloc. Later, the War on Terror shifted the U.S. Military’s focus to the Middle East. A decade of neglect plus the Obama Administration’s reset with Russia in March of 2009 gave Russia room to expand influence in Europe and Central Asia. In Ukraine, Russia’s influence and media campaign laid the groundwork for and directly supported their irregular military operations in 2014.

A. RUSSIA FILLED THE POST-COLD WAR INFORMATION VACUUM

While the U.S. was focused elsewhere, Russia revamped its military, applied the lessons from the Chechen Wars and the conflict in Georgia in 2008, and simultaneously expanded its ability to project a Russian-favorable narrative to the world.⁶⁵⁸ This combination of lack of U.S. attention with a strong pro-Russian narrative laid the groundwork for Russia’s annexation of Crimea and other actions in Ukraine. The Central tenet of Russian irregular warfare against Ukraine is the control of the conflict’s narrative.⁶⁵⁹ Russia used information to cause confusion within the international community long enough to secure strategic objectives with irregular military forces.⁶⁶⁰

As noted in a February 2016 Congressional Research Service report on Ukraine, Russia controls Crimea and nearly one-tenth of Ukrainian territory is occupied by Russian-supported separatist elements. The ceasefire agreement, Minsk-2, has not done

⁶⁵⁸ “Little Green Men: Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014” (United States Army Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, n.d.), 12–15.

⁶⁵⁹ Janis Berzins, Aivar Jaeski, Mark Laity, Nerijus Maliukevicius, Aurimas Navys, Gerry Osborne, Robert Pszczel, Stephen Tatham, “Analysis of Russia’s Information Campaign against Ukraine | StratCom” (Riga, Latvia: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, September 2014), <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/analysis-russias-information-campaign-against-ukraine>.

⁶⁶⁰ Russia’s use of information within the irregular warfare construct should be separated from traditionally military psychological operations. Maria Snegovaya makes the argument that Russia’s use of information to dismiss, distort, distract or dismay international opponents and the larger international community were refreshed Soviet tactics separate and distinct from psychological operations targeting Ukrainian forces’ will to fight. Snegovaya, “Putin’s Information Warfare In Ukraine: Soviet Origins of Russia’s Hybrid Warfare.”

much beyond the cessation of major hostilities as both sides continue to fight from “heavily entrenched positions using a cocktail of snipers, machine guns, artillery and occasionally even tanks.”⁶⁶¹ Despite the selective visa bans against Russian citizens, non-lethal aid to Ukraine, and asset seizures and sanctions against key destabilizing figures in the Russian oligarchy, the Crimea remains in Russian hands and there is little hope of a resolving the conflict on the horizon.⁶⁶² It appears that the conflict in Ukraine will be added to the list of “frozen conflicts” in the post-Soviet Bloc.⁶⁶³

1. Russia Owned the Narrative Prior to Ukraine

Russia’s narrative has dominated throughout the Ukraine conflict. This was in part due to Russia’s focus on international broadcasts targeting Russian and non-Russian speakers through *Rossiya Segodnya* (Russia Today, also known as RT) as well as outlets like *Sputnik* in the decade leading up to the conflict in Ukraine.⁶⁶⁴ Just as the United States reduced public diplomacy through international media, Russia ramped up their efforts.⁶⁶⁵

Reports suggest that Moscow has placed renewed emphasis on international media operations, “which [in 2014 accounted] for 34% of total central government media spending, compared to 25% a year ago.”⁶⁶⁶ International versions of key domestic

⁶⁶¹ Christian Borys, “These Soldiers On Ukraine’s Front Lines Are Starting To Doubt The War’s Value,” *Huffington Post*, November 2, 2016, sec. WorldPost, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/ukraine-front-lines-fight_us_58129002e4b064e1b4b18642.

⁶⁶² Vincent Morelli, *Ukraine Current Issues and U.S. Policy*, (CRS Report No. RL33460) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service), February 22, 2016.

⁶⁶³ Ibid. Russia sees significant potential gain in fomenting intra-territorial strife within countries on the Russian periphery. Russia can then manage the conflict from both sides as “peace keepers” and arms dealers. It is Russia’s modern divide-and-conquer strategy. A good source for how Russia manages these “frozen conflicts” is Robert Orttung, and Christopher Walker, “Putin’s Frozen Conflicts,” *Foreign Policy*, February 13, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/13/putins-frozen-conflicts/>.

⁶⁶⁴ Stephen Ennis, “Russia in ‘Information War’ with West to Win Hearts and Minds,” *BBC News*, September 16, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34248178>.

⁶⁶⁵ Helle C. Dale, *Russia’s “Weaponization” of Information* (Washington, DC), sec. House Foreign Affairs Committee, accessed May 17, 2016, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA00/20150415/103320/HHRG-114-FA00-Wstate-DaleH-20150415.pdf>.

⁶⁶⁶ Peter Pomerantsev, *Confronting Russia’s Weaponization of Information* (Washington, DC, 2014), sec. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA00/20150415/103320/HHRG-114-FA00-Wstate-PomerantsevP-20150415.pdf>.

programming with mixed entertainment and news coverage are available to over 30 million Russian-speaking people outside of Russia in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.⁶⁶⁷ This is exceptionally problematic for western and United States interest as those broadcasts “were actively involved in framing opinions about the situation in Ukraine” and “control is exerted directly by the [Russian] Presidential Administration.”⁶⁶⁸

2. Waning U.S. Interest Prior to Invasion

Since the Cold War, the United States has reduced the U.S. Government’s communication to international audiences while Russia has intensified and expanded their outreach and messaging.⁶⁶⁹ In 1998, as a dividend of the Cold War, the U.S. Congress passed legislation disbanding the United States Information Agency—the focal entity for U.S. public diplomacy during the Cold War—and split the organization between the Department of State and a Broadcasting Board of Governors. In addition to this restructure was a significant reduction in budgetary allocation.⁶⁷⁰

The U.S. information retreat did not stop at the turn of the century. In testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in April of 2015, Helle Dale stated that “the BBG has over the past decade shut down language services and radio transmissions.”⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁸ Janis Berzins et al., “Analysis of Russia’s Information Campaign against Ukraine | StratCom.”

⁶⁶⁹ See RAND report *Beyond Consolidation* (1994) for a thorough analysis and recommendations on how the U.S. Government could have furthered public diplomacy post-Cold War. The Heritage report *Challenging America* (2012) outlines failure points and makes recommendations for course correction prior to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Helle Dale’s testimony after the invasion punctuates her belief that more needs to be done. Helle C. Dale, *Russia’s “Weaponization” of Information*, sec. House Foreign Affairs Committee; John Tedstrom, “Beyond Consolidation: U.S. Government International Broadcasting in the Post-Cold War Era,” Product Page, Monograph Reports (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1994), http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR366.html; Helle C. Dale, Ariel Cohen, and Janice A. Smith, “Challenging America: How Russia, China, and Other Countries Use Public Diplomacy to Compete with the U.S.,” Public Diplomacy (Washington, DC: Heritage, June 21, 2012), <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/06/challenging-america-how-russia-china-and-other-countries-use-public-diplomacy-to-compete-with-the-us>.

⁶⁷⁰ William M. Chodkowski, President Dwight Eisenhower, and President Bill Clinton, “The United States Information Agency - Fact Sheet” (The United States Information Agency, November 2012), <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/ASP%20Reports/Ref%200097%20-%20The%20United%20States%20Information%20Agency.pdf>.

⁶⁷¹ Helle C. Dale, *Russia’s “Weaponization” of Information*, sec. House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Even after the 2008 Russian incursion into Georgia, the BBG continued reductions.⁶⁷² Voice of America, controlled and budgeted for by the BBG, remains the primary conduit to “convey America’s message of liberty, democracy, and free speech” to the world, broadcasting in 43 languages and reaching an estimated 141 million people weekly.⁶⁷³ However, as noted in Dale’s testimony, there is no Voice of America shortwave, AM, or FM broadcasting to Russia (Voice of America, because of Russian contract disputes, moved to podcasting material online).⁶⁷⁴ Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, tacitly acknowledged the extent to which Russian information had diffused during testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in March 2015 when she stated that “the Kremlin’s pervasive propaganda campaign” was “poisoning minds across Russia, on Russia’s periphery and across Europe.”⁶⁷⁵

B. RUSSIAN MILITARY DEVELOPMENT BEFORE THE INVASION 2008–2012

Russia made attempts to modernize its military force several times after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The need for military reform manifested itself when Russia was defeated in the “First” Chechen War. However, it was not until the war with Georgia in 2008 that the need for change overcame Russian bureaucracy.⁶⁷⁶ During the five days of ground conflict inside Georgia, an estimated 40,000 Russian or Russian-allied ground forces fought up to 15,000 Georgian forces.⁶⁷⁷ The Russian troops “relied heavily on massive artillery and aircraft barrages (as opposed to precision targeting)” while fighting

⁶⁷² Ibid.

⁶⁷³ Chodkowski, Eisenhower, and Clinton, “The United States Information Agency - Fact Sheet.”

⁶⁷⁴ “CNN to End Broadcasts on Russian Cable and Satellite TV,” *USA TODAY*, accessed May 25, 2016, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/11/10/cnn-russia-broadcasting-stopped-cable-satellite/18808587/>.

⁶⁷⁵ Victoria Nuland, *Testimony on Ukraine Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee* (Washington, DC, 2015), sec. House Foreign Affairs Committee, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2015/mar/238147.htm>.

⁶⁷⁶ Colby Howard and Ruslan Pukhov, eds., *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, Second Edition (Minneapolis, MN: East View Press, 2015), 74–75.

⁶⁷⁷ Athena Bryce-Rogers, “Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War,” *Demokratizatsiya* 21, no. 3 (2013): 349.

from Soviet doctrine in large maneuver elements to overwhelm the Georgians.⁶⁷⁸ But Russia also blended hallmark Soviet tactics with the introduction of military forces pretending to be peacekeepers and proxy local forces, in addition to bringing further troops into the area during military exercises.⁶⁷⁹ Russia also employed “cyberwarfare and strong propaganda to neutralize Georgia’s warfighting options and to vilify them in the press as aggressors,” as well as selectively managing reporting from the conflict area.⁶⁸⁰

Even though the Russo-Georgian conflict was a solid victory for Moscow (having soundly defeated the Georgian army and taken significant territory), it demonstrated how little progress had been made in reforming the military. While pointing at the need to continue modernization efforts the Georgian campaign also reinforced the use of proxy forces, the success of public denial and obfuscation, and preparation of target audiences (e.g. Russian speakers in living abroad) through propaganda.⁶⁸¹ Among other things, wide-spread introduction of professional service members (rather than conscripts), a “major reshuffle” of cabinet ministers, and “replacement of a large number of Russia’s most senior military commanders” completed the Russian military’s transformation.⁶⁸² These reforms and lessons drawn from the Russia-Georgia conflict were internalized and used to some success against Ukraine.

1. Russia’s View of its Vulnerability

The media dominance of Russian-favorable information is only part of the Ukraine story. Certainly the Soviet Union’s fear of internal domestic uprising was manifested by the current Russian oligarchy in its concern over the Color Revolutions. In 2014, as reported by Anthony Cordesman, the Belarusian Minister of Defense linked domestic uprisings in The Czech Republic, The Balkans, Georgia, Ukraine (2004 and

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁹ “Little Green Men: Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014,” 13–14.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁸¹ “Little Green Men: Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014.”

⁶⁸² Keir Giles and Andrew Monaghan, *Russian Military Transformation--: Goal in Sight?*, The Letort Papers (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2014), <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/download.cfm?q=1196>.

2014), Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan (2005 and 2010) and Belarus with support or instigation from outside the state and blamed on the West.⁶⁸³ He characterized the Color Revolutions as disastrous for the state in which they occurred and for the international community.⁶⁸⁴ Margarete Klein, commenting on Russia's 2014 military doctrine, stated that Russia fears "the possibility of ethnic and religious strife escalating and eroding the internal cohesion on the multi-ethnic state" and that Russia sees itself "as the target" of Western influence especially from the allegedly externally instigated Color Revolutions.⁶⁸⁵

Charles Bartles writes that it is easy to understand why, when characterizing the perceived threats to Russia, Chief of the Russian General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, outlined his view of the threat that Russia and Russian allies would face in the future. He stated that the Russian government must adapt its methods because

the pattern of forced U.S.-sponsored regime change has been largely supplanted by a new method. Instead of an overt military invasion, the first volleys of a U.S. attack come from the installment of political oppositions through state propaganda (e.g. CNN, BBC), the Internet and social media, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). After successfully instilling political dissent, separatism, and/or social strife, the legitimate government has increasing difficulty maintaining order. As the security situation deteriorates, separatist movements can be stoked and strengthened and undeclared special operations, conventional, and private military forces (defense contractors) can be introduced to battle the government and cause further havoc...Eventually, as the government collapses and anarchy results, military forces under the guise of peacekeepers can then be employed to pacify the area.⁶⁸⁶

⁶⁸³ Anthony H. Cordesman, "Russia and the 'Color Revolution'" (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 28, 2014), https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/140529_Russia_Color_Revolution_Full.pdf.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Margarete Klein, "Russia's New Military Doctrine: NATO, the United States and The 'colour Revolutions,'" trans. Meredith Dale, *Stiftung Wissenschaft Und Politik*, February 2015.

⁶⁸⁶ Charles K. Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," *MILITARY REVIEW*, 2016, http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20160228_art009.pdf.

In an amazing instance of mirror imaging, General Gerasimov outlined to a domestic audience how NATO and the U.S. could, through a Color Revolution, threaten Russia or a Russian ally with domestic intervention. While “Gerasimov is simply explaining his view of the operational environment and the nature of future war,”⁶⁸⁷ he gives the world a glimpse of Russia’s interpretation of how the West will fight in the future based on his characterization of the nature of future wars. That interpretation comes with the imperative that Russia needs to implement what it perceives the West has been doing for decades. It also gives a clear picture of how Russia approached its intervention in Ukraine. More to the point, as Margarete Klein points out, Russia’s military doctrine calls for the “integrated use of military force and of political, informational, and other non-military measures. This approach is supplemented by indirect and asymmetrical forms of deployment...the use of special forces, armed irregulars and private military companies. These means permit an open military intervention to be disguised.”⁶⁸⁸

2. Duel for Control Leads to War

Russian-backed Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich felt immense pressure during the winter of 2013–2014. His refusal to sign an agreement associating Ukraine with the European Union caused the growth of protestors in Kiev’s Independence Square from under 100,000 to nearly 800,000 people in early 2014.⁶⁸⁹ As pressure continued to mount, Putin accused the United States and the European Union of trying to destabilize the country and encroach on the Russian “sphere of influence.”⁶⁹⁰ Despite political and economic maneuvers by both Yanukovich and Moscow, it was clear in early February that Yanukovich lost control in Ukraine.⁶⁹¹ February 18th began a two-day death knell for Yanukovich, when 76 protestors were killed by police, allegedly with the help of Russian

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁶⁸⁸ Klein, “Russia’s New Military Doctrine.”

⁶⁸⁹ “Ukraine Protests: ‘Fringe’ Demonstrators Storm Council,” *BBC News*, accessed May 22, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25177679>.

⁶⁹⁰ “Timeline: Political Crisis in Ukraine and Russia’s Occupation of Crimea,” *Reuters*, March 8, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-timeline-idUSBREA270PO20140308>.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid.

Federal Security Service personnel in Ukraine trying to manage the protests.⁶⁹² As violence spread throughout the country in response to the massacre, Yanukovich fled to Crimea. He later fled to Russia.

The focus for both Russia and Ukraine shifted from the protests in Kiev to Crimea. Russia has a significant history of ownership of Crimea dating back to Empress Catherine II's declaration in April 1783 annexing Crimea.⁶⁹³ Certainly in 2014, the Russian interest in Crimea was not historical alone. In the lead-up to the 2008 conflict with Georgia, Russia issued passports to Abkhazians and South Ossetians, then used the fact that those "Russian citizens" were threatened by Georgia as a rationale to invade Georgia.⁶⁹⁴ Russia has attempted a similar policy in Crimea in order to thinly justify annexation. Indeed, the convenient Russian State policy "'on Compatriots Living Abroad'...provides the state's duty to defend its compatriots abroad from any kind of threat to their rights or physical well-being"⁶⁹⁵ gives a blank check for Russian intervention nearly anywhere it has issued passports. Intervention to protect its citizens outside of Russian borders is nothing new. As has already been demonstrated, it was a major reason for further expeditions into Central Asia in the nineteenth century.

This self-imposed duty of the Russian state worked nicely for Russia with the importance of the anchorage for the Black Sea Fleet to create an impetus for deeper involvement in Ukraine. In the past, ships based in Crimea and Sevastopol projected Soviet naval power in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf as well as the Indian and Atlantic oceans.⁶⁹⁶ The importance of a Crimean naval base for Russian power projection was not lost on Moscow. As Dmitry Boltenkov records, Moscow negotiated with Ukraine in 2010 to extend basing rights for another 25 years and to invest

⁶⁹² "Special Police Shot Kiev Protesters, Inquiry Says," *BBC News*, accessed May 24, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26868119>.

⁶⁹³ Howard and Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, 1–3.

⁶⁹⁴ Vincent M. Artman, "Annexation by Passport," *Aljazeera*, March 14, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/3/ukraine-russia-crimeapassportizationcitizenship.html>.

⁶⁹⁵ Janis Berzins et al., "Analysis of Russia's Information Campaign against Ukraine | StratCom."

⁶⁹⁶ Howard and Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, 135–139.

86 billion rubles by 2020.⁶⁹⁷ With Russian information strategy in Ukraine faltering and the threat of the self-titled Maidan protests loudly heard, Russia felt as though it had to act or potentially lose one of the most significant ex-Soviet states to the European Union and possibly NATO. In fact, Russian leadership may have thought the base so vital to they were willing to annex Crimean when faced with its potential loss at the hands of a hostile government in Kiev.

C. RUSSIAN IRREGULAR WARFARE IN UKRAINE

Maria Snegovaya argues that the Russian information campaign in the context of its war with Ukraine centers around four Soviet approaches. Namely, Russia dismissed facts and events, distorted information, distracted from Russian action and caused dismay (and therefore inaction) in potential adversaries.⁶⁹⁸ Russia's first use of military force, or as Anton Lavrov calls it, "the active phase of its operation"⁶⁹⁹ came under the cover of a large military drill in the Central and Western Military Districts.⁷⁰⁰ Applying the Soviet information obfuscation approach to the events in Ukraine, the military exercises that overshadowed Moscow's first use of Special Operations Forces distracted Ukrainian and Western leaders long enough for Moscow to militarily achieve what it had failed to do with other instruments of power up to that point.

The exercises undoubtedly were meant to signal to Ukraine the overwhelming power Moscow had at its disposal and could bring to bear against Ukraine if necessary. Deliberately and effectually showing Kiev what the cost of escalation would be while

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁸ Snegovaya, "Putin's Information Warfare In Ukraine: Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare."

⁶⁹⁹ Lavrov's 'active phase' is most likely a reference to the Soviet era *aktivnye meropriyatiya* or "active measures." A good resource on Soviet "active measures" is held by the National Archives and Records Administration and can be located online <https://archive.org/details/gov.archives.arc.54826>.

⁷⁰⁰ Howard and Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, 162–163.

simultaneously denying involvement created hesitation in the brand new Ukrainian government.⁷⁰¹

1. Crimea—*Coup de Main*

On the 25th of February, a Russian ship unloaded 300 armed soldiers in Ukraine. A move which had not been approved or coordinated with Ukraine.⁷⁰² On the 26th, the same day Putin ordered the large exercises, three armored vehicles with seven additional trucks blocked the runway at Belbek airfield (home of 45 Ukrainian MiG-29 fighters which amounted to the bulk of Ukrainian airpower in Crimea).⁷⁰³ Additional troops were tasked with seizing airports and controlling other key infrastructure in Crimea.⁷⁰⁴ Some of these forces were Russian *Spetsnaz* who were given the mission to secure the Crimean parliament building, which they did at 4:25 am on the 27th of February.⁷⁰⁵ A day later, three transport helicopters escorted by eight attack helicopters sneaked into Ukraine without Ukrainian authorization and landed at Kacha airfield (a Russian-leased airfield).⁷⁰⁶ As part of the lease agreement, attack helicopters were not allowed in Ukraine. With Ukrainian aircraft successfully grounded and Russian anti-armor capable helicopters in Crimea, Russia had a huge advantage over Ukraine.⁷⁰⁷ On February 28th, Russia directed 8–10 transport aircraft from Anapa (where they were taking part in the exercises Putin directed on the 26th of February) to an airfield near Crimea's capital,

⁷⁰¹ In 2004, Timothy Thomas wrote about Russia's Reflexive Control Theory. Thomas notes four ways to transfer information to the enemy so that, in response to the information presented, the enemy does what you want. In the case of Crimea, an argument can be made that Russia used three of the four (Power Pressure, Measures to present false information, and Altering the decision-making time). Timothy Thomas, "Russia's Reflexive Control Theory and the Military," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 17, no. 2 (June 2004): 237–56, doi:10.1080/13518040490450529, 244–245.

⁷⁰² Howard and Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, 163.

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴ "Little Green Men: Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014," 56.

⁷⁰⁵ Howard and Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, 163. These actions correlate to Gerasimov's fourth stage in conflict, *Crisis*, where military means compliment nonmilitary means with "Strategic Deployment" of troops (as seen in the exercises ordered by Putin on the 26th) and by "Conducting Military Operations" (*Spetsnaz* seizure of Crimean parliament building, the Belbek airfield and introduction attack helicopters). For more detailed analysis of the events in Crimea through Gerasimov's model, see "Little Green Men," 50–54.

⁷⁰⁶ "Little Green Men: Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014."

⁷⁰⁷ Howard and Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, 163–165.

Simferopol, and only 50 miles from the port city of Sevastopol. This airlift would have been enough to land nearly 1,500 Russian *Spetsnaz* in Crimea.⁷⁰⁸ While other reporting suggests that there could have been a blend of *Spetsnaz*, the newly formed Special Operations Forces, naval infantry and intelligence operatives,⁷⁰⁹ the purpose of any and all such forces was the same. They were the Russian irregulars that would operate without governmental acknowledgement enabling a swift and bloodless usurpation of Crimea.⁷¹⁰

Moscow continued to dismiss reports coming from Crimea about its involvement. While Russian unmarked troops in unmarked vehicles were busy seizing key infrastructure like the state-run television company during the aforementioned operations, the Russian Black Sea Fleet was denying the involvement of any of its troops.⁷¹¹ At the same time, Vitaly Churkin, Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, alluded to "visitors" who portended to know the direction Ukraine wanted to go (toward the West) and that it was the impact these "visitors" had which may have caused the crisis. During the same press conference at the United Nations Security Council, Churkin stated any troop movements in Crimea were "within the framework" of the basing agreement between Ukraine and Russia – a statement which was patently false, demonstrated by the presence of Mi-35M attack helicopter's arrival that morning.⁷¹² These misleading statements and denials of involvement were designed to create space and buy time for Russia to secure its goal of acquiring Crimea. They were also the culmination of years of preparation and saturation in the information realm.

Within days, Putin received an authorization for the use of force in Ukraine from his parliament and the Crimean peninsula had been effectively blockaded from the air,

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., 165.

⁷⁰⁹ "Little Green Men: Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014," 56–57.

⁷¹⁰ Howard and Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, 214.

⁷¹¹ "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline: Russian Forces Occupy Strategic Facilities in Crimea," *The Ukraine Crisis Timeline*, accessed May 23, 2016, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

⁷¹² Vitaly Churkin, *Vitaly Churkin (Russian Federation) on Ukraine - Security Council Media Stakeout (28 February 2014)* (United Nations Security Council, 2014), <http://webtv.un.org/watch/vitaly-churkin-russian-federation-on-ukraine-security-council-media-stakeout-28-february-2014/3272527595001/>.

land and sea by Russian and pro-Russian forces.⁷¹³ By March, Russia had gained control over all 193 military facilities in Crimea.⁷¹⁴ When Crimea was annexed on the 18th of March, two days after a hasty referendum, 22,000 Ukrainian troops were left in Crimea. Of those Ukrainian troops, over 9,000 servicemen and nearly 7,000 contractors swore oaths to Russia and accepted Russian citizenship.⁷¹⁵

Putin admitted in April 2014 that Russian troops were, in fact, involved in the operations within Crimea.⁷¹⁶ On May 9th 2014, some of the units that had taken part of in the annexation of Crimea marched in the annual Victory Day parade in Moscow's Red Square.⁷¹⁷ Putin's acknowledgment of involvement, after such strong protests at all levels of the Russian government that Russia was not involved despite copious amounts of evident to the contrary, confirmed statements made by the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet a month earlier.⁷¹⁸ The effect of Russia's openness, post-annexation of Crimea, was to diminish the effectiveness—to the point of ridiculousness—of its future denials of involvement in eastern Ukraine.

2. Eastern Ukraine

Perhaps because Russia's interest was less direct, its involvement in Eastern Ukraine followed suit. Russia again used intelligence officers and *Spetsnaz* forces in Eastern Ukraine.⁷¹⁹ Russian forces in the east used "bribery or intimidation to coerce local officials" and amplified or created tension in many of the towns.⁷²⁰ Again Russian or Russian-supported forces captured administration and governance buildings. They seized television and radio stations, replacing Ukrainian programming with pro-Moscow

⁷¹³ "Ukraine Crisis: Timeline," *BBC News*, accessed May 22, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275>.

⁷¹⁴ Howard and Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, 178.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁶ Morelli, "Ukraine Current Issues and U.S. Policy," 11.

⁷¹⁷ Howard and Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, 214.

⁷¹⁸ "Little Green Men: Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014," 56.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 58–59.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*

broadcasts and Russian television.⁷²¹ Russian forces trained, equipped and accompanied militias, adventure seekers, and Cossack volunteers.⁷²² Russian specialists operated technical equipment, such as the BUK surface-to-air missile system which downed Malaysian airlines flight MH17 killing all passengers aboard.⁷²³ Even as Ukraine claimed that significant portions of the anti-Ukrainian forces in the East were Russian soldiers, Moscow denied any involvement.⁷²⁴

Moscow's covert support to the separatist regions in eastern Ukraine seems to be linked to their success. As long as the separatists were making gains with only equipment and advisors from Russia, Moscow did not become overtly involved. However, when Ukrainian rebels were being pushed back in July and August, Russia became directly involved with overt military expeditions backing the rebels. Geoffrey Pyatt, the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, stated that when Russian advisors and military aid stopped being sufficient for the rebels to defend against Ukraine, Putin authorized "an increasing number of Russian troops [who] are intervening directly in fighting on Ukrainian territory."⁷²⁵

In fact, even after Ukraine captured 10 Russian paratroopers deep inside Ukraine who were actively involved in combat, Moscow claimed the soldiers were lost and had crossed the border by accident.⁷²⁶ At other times, when confronted with destroyed versions of Russian military equipment inside Ukraine—equipment that had not been

⁷²¹ "Little Green Men: Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014."

⁷²² Mark Galeotti, "'Hybrid War' and 'Little Green Men': How It Works, and How It Doesn't," *E-International Relations*, accessed May 23, 2016, <http://www.e-ir.info/2015/04/16/hybrid-war-and-little-green-men-how-it-works-and-how-it-doesnt/>.

⁷²³ Simon Ostrovsky, "Russian Roulette (Dispatch 50): Separatists Shoot Down Ukrainian Plane," *VICE News*, June 20, 2014, <https://news.vice.com/video/russian-roulette-dispatch-50-separatists-shoot-down-ukrainian-plane>; "Ukraine: Malaysia Airlines Flight Downed By Russian-Made Missile, Dutch Report Says," *Stratfor*, accessed May 23, 2016, <https://www.stratfor.com/situation-report/ukraine-malaysia-airlines-flight-downed-russian-made-missile-dutch-report-says>.

⁷²⁴ "Little Green Men: Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014," 58–60.

⁷²⁵ Neil MacFarquhar and Michael R. Gordon, "Ukraine Leader Says 'Huge Loads of Arms' Pour in From Russia," *The New York Times*, August 28, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/29/world/europe/ukraine-conflict.html>.

⁷²⁶ "Little Green Men: Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014," 61.

exported—Russia continued to deny supplying arms or other support to the anti-Kiev forces in the east.⁷²⁷

Although leaders in the Kremlin continued to deny any involvement, it was clear to the international community that Russia was involved in supporting the rebels. NATO Secretary General Anders Rasmussen stated that “we saw a Russian incursion, a crossing of the Ukrainian border. It just confirms the fact that we see a continuous flow of weapons and fighters from Russia into eastern Ukraine and it is a clear demonstration of continued Russian involvement” there.⁷²⁸ Despite an avalanche of reports, photographs, and released satellite imagery, a spokesman for the Russia Defense Ministry stated in retort to the NATO claim that “[w]e no longer pay attention to the allegations made by Mr. Rasmussen and his press secretary.”⁷²⁹

The combat stress on Ukraine combined with the international pressure on both sides to end the conflict. The cease-fire agreement was arranged in September and called for international monitoring from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), exchanges of prisoners and the withdrawal of armed groups from Ukrainian territory.⁷³⁰

This initial agreement halted conflict only for a while. There were several, significant flare-ups of the conflict before violence subsided to some degree after the signing of the second cease-fire. Between the implementation of the first plan in September 2014 and the second plan in February 2015 there were an additional 1,300 deaths caused by the conflict.⁷³¹

⁷²⁷ Maria Tsvetkova and Aleksandar Vasovic, “Exclusive: Charred Tanks in Ukraine Point to Russian Involvement,” *Reuters*, October 23, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-tanks-exclusive-idUSKCN0IC1GE20141023>.

⁷²⁸ Terrence McCoy, “Russians Troops Fighting in Ukraine? Naw. They’re Just on ‘vacation.’” *The Washington Post*, August 28, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/08/28/russians-troops-fighting-in-ukraine-naw-just-on-vacation/>.

⁷²⁹ Ibid.

⁷³⁰ Morelli, “Ukraine Current Issues and U.S. Policy,” 13.

⁷³¹ Ibid.

D. IRREGULAR WARFARE AT THE COST OF CREDIBILITY

If Alexei Levinson is correct in arguing that “Russia’s new propaganda is not now about selling a particular worldview, it is about trying to distort information flows and fuel nervousness among European audiences,” then in the case of Crimea, Russia’s disinformation campaign supported its irregular warfare with great success. Muddying the water gained the Kremlin just enough plausible deniability to confuse the international community for the time needed to achieve its military goals. The problem for Russia, as it quickly found out, is that “disinformation campaigns erode over time.”⁷³²

In the case of the rest of the fighting in Eastern Ukraine, Russia’s constant denial of its involvement became so trite that it would have been laughable if it were not such a serious matter. As Maria Snegovaya said, “[o]nce the initial effects of unpredictability and confusion wear off, the credibility of the side applying disinformation starts to decline dramatically.”⁷³³ One Gallup poll taken in April of 2014 stated that only two percent of Ukrainians listed Russian broadcast sources on their top three important sources of information.⁷³⁴ In August of 2012, 32 percent of respondents had a favorable view of economic union with the EU, while 42 percent favored Russia; by March of 2014, 52 percent favored the EU and only 27 percent favored Russia.⁷³⁵ An August 2015 Pew Research Center captured the trend aptly in the title of their report “Russia, Putin Held in low regard around the world.”⁷³⁶ However, in that same report, Putin pulls an impressive 88 percent favorability rating domestically.⁷³⁷

Clearly if Russia intended information and propaganda to change the attitudes and minds of Ukrainian people, or the West, the policy failed. If, however, all Russia wanted

⁷³² Janis Berzins et al., “Analysis of Russia’s Information Campaign against Ukraine | StratCom.”

⁷³³ Snegovaya, “Putin’s Information Warfare In Ukraine: Soviet Origins of Russia’s Hybrid Warfare,” 18.

⁷³⁴ “Media and News During the Crisis in Ukraine,” *Broadcasting Board of Governors*, June 2014, <http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2014/06/Ukraine-slide-deck.pdf>.

⁷³⁵ Ibid.

⁷³⁶ Bruce Stokes, “Russia, Putin Held in Low Regard around the World,” *Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project*, August 5, 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/08/05/russia-putin-held-in-low-regard-around-the-world/>.

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

to do was to create an air of momentary indecision, second guessing, and international hesitations to enable a larger irregular warfare strategy, then Russia's operations in and prior to Ukraine were very successful. Putin created the time and conditions necessary to conduct a covert military action in Crimea. He consolidated a near-bloodless military victory when he annexed Crimea. However, as time wore on the value of the Russian misinformation deteriorated quickly. So much so that a German newspaper said that Russia's *Sputnik Deutschland* "can hardly be called successful" and that it "does not enjoy large outreach."⁷³⁸ A comparison the of international news channel's twitter followers show a 7 million follower lead by BBC over RT, and CNN's nearly 15 million followers dominate RT's 815,000 followers.⁷³⁹

Even patently false "news" can be distributed quickly, something Moscow will continue to rely on, as demonstrated by a November 2016 false RT news story about 16 American soldiers killed and 27 wounded battling ISIS in Mosul.⁷⁴⁰ So, while reports coming from Russian sources continue to lose credibility, Moscow will continue to count on diffusion across the web and social media to carry its narrative.

Indicative of the biggest irony of the entire campaign, Russia's approval rating in Ukraine plummeted nearly 90 percent.⁷⁴¹ This is in large part because Russia annexed Crimea and the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, meaning the sympathetic or pro-Russian population remain out of control of the Ukrainian government (as well as the reach of pollsters).⁷⁴² So, while the irregular warfare campaign was a success, the information component wore thin quickly and disintegrated altogether eventually. After a thousand years as the "Mother of Rus Cities," Russia has replaced its once-special relationship

⁷³⁸ Snegovaya, "Putin's Information Warfare In Ukraine: Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare," 20.

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁰ "16 U.S. Soldiers Killed, 27 Wounded since Start of Mosul Op – Military Source," *RT International*, accessed November 26, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/365841-us-soldiers-killed-mosul/>.

⁷⁴¹ Julie Ray and Neli Esipova, "Ukrainian Approval of Russia's Leadership Dives Almost 90%," *Gallup.com*, accessed November 19, 2016, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/180110/ukrainian-approval-russia-leadership-dives-almost.aspx>.

⁷⁴² Dmitry Gorenburg and Ryan Evan, *The State of Russian Strategy: Ukraine, Syria, and Beyond*, accessed September 22, 2015, <http://warontherocks.com/2015/09/the-state-of-russian-strategy-ukraine-syria-and-beyond/>.

with Kiev with a hostile government and alienated people.⁷⁴³ Clearly there is a price to pay for incorporating so much false information for so long to scantily cover a large irregular warfare operation.

The experience in Ukraine clearly demonstrates that, under Putin's rule, Russia is prepared and willing to use irregular warfare to achieve desired objectives. The conflict in Ukraine displays Russia's use of information operations and covert action, both backed by swift, decisive conventional military force when necessary. Irregular forces, denied by Moscow, delivered a *coup de main* and the annexation of Crimea. Covert support given to proxy forces in Eastern Ukraine led to another "frozen conflict" in the former Soviet sphere. The Russian-backed separatists provide Moscow a leverage point for years to come.

⁷⁴³ Richard A French, "Kiev, Ukraine," *Britannica*, 2009, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kiev>.

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IX. CONCLUSION

In the 1812 campaign, flexibility, mobility and decentralized command allowed Davydov to flourish against Napoleon's better trained and more disciplined cavalry. Those same characteristics, when discarded, hampered the Soviet partisans' operations during the Great Patriotic War. Gratuitous usage of firepower and retaliatory raids or strikes can be seen from the Russians' earliest interactions in the Caucasus and Central Asia through their involvement in Syria today. More significant, though, is the deliberate transition from Russian-led to surrogate-led warfare in Central Asia, in Afghanistan as well as in the latter stages of involvement in the Caucasus. In those cases where Russia transitioned from scorched-earth to counterinsurgency, Russia largely succeeded.

A. SUMMARY

In 1812, it was only after the Russian army was nearly exhausted that its leadership allowed a different type of cavalry officer to exploit French weakness that the regular troops could not. Davydov's purpose-built forces incorporated Cossack formations successfully and garnered support from local peasants to ensure freedom of action on the battlefield. Through flexibility, decentralized command, and innovative tactics Davydov showed how an irregular force was able to achieve a spectacular impact.

Novel tactical and operational adjustments often allowed Russian forces to achieve significant military victories over inhospitable natives in unforgiving terrain. During the late 19th century, tailored unit structures and deviations from long-standing European norms allowed Russia to achieve results with relatively few forces in Central Asia. As the Russian Empire expanded deeper into Central Asia, stability came through the employment of locals in irregular, combined units, further amplifying the economy of force Russia achieved.

In the wake of World War I, through trial and error and over several years of tough combat during the Russian Civil War, irregular units proved themselves invaluable to Bolshevik leadership. Partisans and other irregulars provided local knowledge of both the human terrain as well as techniques for operating in Russia's varied harsh climates.

Guerrilla fighters once again proved the importance of decentralized command and flexibility while operating toward a clear objective; this was true both for the Reds and for the Whites operating against them.

While Soviet historians oversold the impact of partisans in World War II, they accomplished much. Soviet partisans demonstrated the effectiveness of well-organized guerrilla forces fighting in occupied territory. Partisan operations clearly demonstrated the need for knowledgeable, trained leadership to be available before the need arises. Stalin purposefully curtailed readiness because of the perceived political danger to his regime. Thus, in the end partisan impact was limited by Stalin's overbearing control.

In Afghanistan, Russia's old habits died hard. The policy of removing insurgent support networks by eradicating villages caused massive civilian hardship, displacement, and death. The cold, calculated approach to propping up an inherently unstable central government in Afghanistan through massive bombardments finally gave way to a more Afghan-centric approach. Emphasis on training Afghan intelligence, police, and military units enabled the Soviets to turn the responsibility of the war over to the same. The policy was successful in that it allowed an organized Soviet disentanglement from Afghanistan and ensured stability until, after the dissolution of the USSR, when military support was no longer given.

Russian involvement in the Caucasus both in the 19th century and after the collapse of the Soviet Union was initially characterized by extreme brutality. Only after complete saturation of 300,000 troops was Imperial Russia able to claim victory in the 19th century. And that did not last. Russian failure to adapt from conventional to irregular warfare made its army extremely vulnerable during the 1994–1996 war. During the “Second” Chechen War beginning in 1999, Russian troops eventually adopted the irregular techniques of their opponents, and in so doing found success. However, it was the deliberate selection of a strong Moscow-loyal Chechen leader and the brokering of deals within the Caucasus' tribal structures that led to Chechnya being brought back under Russian rule.

Using the lessons of Chechnya and Georgia, the Russian military significantly retooled itself. The force that invaded Ukraine incorporated lessons from history, taken from victories and defeats alike. In the Crimea, they were decentralized and swiftly achieved their military objectives. Irregular warfare was skillfully applied by Moscow to achieve a near-bloodless annexation. The Russian forces that conducted the irregular campaign were supported by a state-led narrative and significant propaganda. At critical junctures, they were even supported by conventional Russian forces. Even though that narrative was thin, it was enough to push international decision cycles past the time it took Russia to make the gains from an irregular operation permanent. However, less success was achieved in Donbass, in part because this current form of irregular warfare had lost some of its quality of surprise.

B. APPLICATION

Defense Secretary Ashton Carter may have been correct labeling Russia the number one threat to the United States in 2016. As demonstrated by their campaign in Ukraine, the Russian government under Putin has the ability and willpower to conduct irregular warfare. Russia is comfortable conducting irregular warfare as a significant policy tool. It is, then, imperative to know the roots of Russian irregular warfare, to understand its current usage and think about ways to counter it.

It is important to avoid labeling Russian tactics in Ukraine as new. Rather, they should be seen as an extension and full realization of the Russian irregular warfare experience. Russia continues to study, refine, and adapt warfare techniques to gain advantages; looking back, as well as projecting forward, to drive readiness and meet future challenges head-on. It is striking that both Russian General Gerasimov and American General Joseph Votel acknowledged and predicted most future conflict will, at least in large part, be irregular.

Granted that each case is unique to its own circumstances, there are still common threads that link Russia's long and storied history of irregular warfare experiences with current challenges. Although future challenges will undoubtedly be different and unique in their own right, understanding the roots of Russian irregular warfare may help clearly

identify and enable us to counter irregular warfare conducted by other elements or governments, especially Russian. It may also help sharpen U.S. irregular warfare options.

As General Gerasimov said, “no matter how well-developed his forces and means of armed conflict may be, forms and methods for overcoming them can be found.”⁷⁴⁴ To that end, understanding the roots of Russian irregular warfare—their experiences and how they adapted to unique challenges—could prove invaluable to understating the future of conflict.

⁷⁴⁴ Valery Gerasimov, “The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations,” trans. Robert Coalson, *Military-Industrial Kurier*, February 27, 2013, 29http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20160228_art008.pdf.

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